PATTERNS
OF
POWER

The Patron and the Priest

Kublai Khan, Phagpa, and the Sakya Century

1240 — 1270 — 1354

Thomas J. Bryan
with Claude (Anthropic)

◆

Held as tested, not revealed.
A case study in the Patterns of Power series.

Primary sources quoted exactly; modern scholarship paraphrased and credited.
Contested figures given as ranges. Nothing reconstructed from memory.

CONTENTS

Preface
PREFACE AND OUTLINE

Landscape
THE MOST LEARNED OF THEM ALL

Module 1
CONQUERED BY LETTER

Module 2
THE THIRTEEN MYRIARCHIES

Module 3
EACH AUTHORISED THE OTHER

Module 4
THE SCRIPT THAT NOBODY WROTE IN

Module 5
A THOUSAND INGOTS AND FIFTY-NINE THOUSAND BOLTS

Module 6
THE CENSUS OF 1268

Module 7
WRITTEN LONG AFTERWARDS

Module 8
FIVE FURTHER WIVES

Module 9
THE DRIKUNG BURNED THE MONASTERIES

Module 10
BEFORE THE DYNASTY THAT MADE THEM

Module 11
THE ROAD AND THE TRANSLATION

Module 12
THE FOURTH POSITION

PREFACE AND OUTLINE

Front matter · how this study was made, the disciplines it holds itself to, and a map of its fourteen parts

The collaboration

This is a case study in the Patterns of Power series, applying the series' framework to the relationship between the Mongol imperial house and the Sakya school of Tibetan Buddhism — from the campaign of 1240 and Sakya Pandita's journey to Liangzhou, through Phagpa's elevation as Imperial Preceptor and the census of 1268, to the Sakya's displacement in 1354 and the formula's long afterlife. The framework is a lens for reading how any order of power is founded, dressed and held: the floor of force, the robe of doctrine laid over it, the settlement that divides the spoils, the cost column, the seam through which beliefs are managed, the default by which an elite coordinates without instruction, and position logic beneath it all.

The study was built one module at a time. The author brought the framework and the judgement of the whole; Claude, Anthropic's model, did the research — verifying load-bearing dates and figures by search before any module was written — and produced the drafts. Where the research contradicted the framework's expectation, the research was followed.

What this case isolates

This is the fourth study in a sequence and it completes a table the first three had left open.

Those studies established two variables. **Where an interpretive class's credential lives** — in an office, and therefore capturable, as with Latin ordination; or in a person, and therefore capturable at no price, as with the Islamic *ijāza*. And **where its funding lives** — in a perpetual private endowment, which no ruler can quietly close, or in a terminable state grant, which is the strongest lever a ruler can hold.

This case supplies a third value for each. The Sakya credential lived in a **family**: the Khön had held the abbotship since 1073 and passed it uncle to nephew. And the clergy

was funded by **exemption**, which is the cheapest instrument to grant and the most expensive to reverse, since withdrawing one is not a decision to stop paying but a decision to start taking.

But the case's real distinction is something none of the first three had, and it changes the question the sequence was asking. **Kublai could choose.** The Seljuks took the caliphate because it was the only source of Islamic title in existence; the German emperors took the papacy because there was no other church; Akbar took the *'ulamā'* because they were the only jurists in Hindustan. Kublai had Confucians, Daoists, Muslims, Nestorians, a Mongol shamanic tradition and four or five Tibetan schools, and a general who graded them for him.

And what he did with the choice is the finding. **He declined the capturable credential and bought the uncapturable one.** He ruled China and suspended the civil service examinations — the most perfectly capturable instrument any civilisation has built, and the one the Qing would use for two hundred and sixty-eight years — restoring them only in 1315, held six times in the dynasty's ninety-seven years, with a third of the places reserved for Mongols. In their place he imported a foreign clergy of a few lineages, whose credential he could never hold. **Because a credential a ruler can capture is a credential that can capture the ruler**: the examination would have delivered a steerable bureaucracy and a constitution in the same package, and he wanted the first without the second.

The case also supplies a form of authorisation the sequence had not met. Everywhere else it runs one way. Here **each party holds a title the other conferred** — Kublai a *cakravartin* because Phagpa says so, Phagpa Imperial Preceptor because Kublai says so — which looks like a circle and is not, for the reason Module 12 sets out.

The problem of the sources

The evidentiary position here is the weakest of the four studies and its weakness has a specific shape.

The imperial record is Chinese and administrative: the *Yuan shi*, compiled under the Ming in 1370 from what survived a collapse, treating Tibet as bureaus, appointments, seals and titles. The Tibetan record is religious historiography written mostly a century or more after the events — the Red Annals of the mid-fourteenth century, the *Rgya bod yig tshang* of 1434, the Blue Annals of the 1470s — organised around lineages, teachers and the merit of patrons.

So the arrangement is recorded from two directions, both from above, in two genres neither of which has a place for a governed population. There is no

dissenting insider here, no pamphlet war, no legal literature stating what a cultivator was owed. The censuses counted households and the counts survive in a form that tells us nothing about them.

The lateness of the Tibetan record has one consequence the study has had to handle repeatedly. The founding scene — Kublai granting Tibet to Phagpa in 1253 in gratitude for a tantric initiation — comes through that later historiography and is qualified by recent research: Möngke had divided Central Tibet into appanages under Mongol princes in 1251, and Phagpa's authority in fact accumulated across seventeen years in a series of imperial appointments. The study reports both and prefers the administrative sequence for chronology while taking the donation tradition seriously as evidence of what the relationship became.

One further matter requires a statement. **The formula at the centre of this case, *mchod yon*, is a live political claim and not only a historical description.** It was invoked at the Simla Conference of 1913 and is invoked now; the Chinese state maintains one reading and the Tibetan government-in-exile another, and named scholars — Sperling, van Schaik, Goldstein among them — hold that the symmetrical reading oversimplifies. **This study takes no position on the question of Tibet's historic political status.** Its analysis is of how legitimating descriptions work, and identifying one as constructed is not an argument that it was false; a description can be constructed and true, and this collection has repeatedly found that a built thing can become real.

No figures are given anywhere in this study for the population of Tibet, for the yield of any myriarchy, for tribute, or for casualties in any of the risings, because the surviving material supports none.

The disciplines

Five rules govern every module. **Quotation**: public-domain primary sources exactly, modern scholarship paraphrased and credited. **No fabrication**: nothing invented or reconstructed from memory, and where a text has not been verified the study says so rather than paraphrasing it as though from the document. **Gravity without partisanship. Legibility is not pardon.** And **held as tested, not revealed** — the pattern is a tendency, never a law.

What this case added to the framework

The central contribution is the completed table set out in Module 12, and the proposition that gives it force: **a credential a ruler can capture is a credential that can capture the ruler**, so that the value of capture is not unconditional and

a conqueror outside the population's culture may rationally prefer a foreign clergy that legitimates without prescribing.

Beneath that, findings the case forced. That where a conqueror has no doctrine and his conquest contains several competing suppliers of religious authority, **he selects rather than borrows, and the criterion is the reliability of the supply rather than the truth of the doctrine** — the Mongols chose the Sakya partly because a hereditary succession is predictable. That a credential lodged in a family is **hostage to biology**, so that a patron with no other lever ends up managing the family's marriages, and will over-correct: guarding against extinction, he produces fragmentation. That **a decentralised polity is expensive to conquer and cheap to co-opt**, and a centralised one the reverse. That a patron's army in a client's country exists to hold the client in place, so its first enemies are the client's own subordinates. That **mutual authorisation fails by hollowing rather than by capture**, and is load-bearing only while both parties retain a base the other did not supply. That **a ruler with several clergies can adjudicate**, which is a far stronger position than patronage or publicity, so that a ruler is best placed with respect to religion when he has several religions and worst when he has one. That a medium can be decreed and its use cannot, because the users are the apparatus and were formed before the decree. That funding instruments rank by **cost of reversal**, with exemption the cheapest to grant and dearest to undo. That **a client cannot be given a monopoly by a patron who does not have one**, so a plural empire generates plurality in its client's country whether it means to or not. That an authority conferred from outside **occupies the position a native authority would have had to build and leaves nothing when it withdraws.** And that a client regime's danger dates not from its patron's collapse but from **the first moment its patron has a more urgent problem elsewhere** — which is why the Sakya lost Tibet in 1354 and the Yuan lost China in 1368, in that order.

The arc

Landscape. *The Most Learned of Them All.* A country with no government and four competing schools, an empire with no doctrine and a policy of exempting every clergy from tax, and a general asked to advise on which lama to send for.

1 — The Floor of Force. *Conquered by Letter.* A country taken by a circular addressed to its abbots, the census that made the taking real, and the army that arrived thirty years later to enforce it.

2 — The Settlement. *The Thirteen Myriarchies.* What was actually granted and when, why the founding donation appears to have been written afterwards, and a hereditary abbotship the emperor eventually filled from outside the family.

3 — The Robe. *Each Authorised the Other.* A formula in which the priest crowns the patron and the patron enthrones the priest, and a description still being argued over in the twentieth century.

4 — Formation. *The Script That Nobody Wrote In.* An emperor who switched off the only capturable credential in the world, a new alphabet decreed for an empire, and the debate in which one clergy was made to destroy another in front of the throne.

5 — The Cost Column. *A Thousand Ingots and Fifty-Nine Thousand Bolts.* What an imported clergy cost, the exemption that was the real expense, and the country that paid for a road it did not use.

6 — Extraction. *The Census of 1268.* What was actually taken from Tibet, why the answer is less than the arrangement implies, and the difference between administering a country and holding a road through it.

7 — Information and Suppression. *Written Long Afterwards.* An arrangement recorded almost entirely by one side, a century after it ended.

8 — Elite Coordination and the Default. *Five Further Wives.* A credential that reproduced itself biologically, and the court that took charge of a Tibetan family's marriages.

9 — Plurality or Foreclosure. *The Drikung Burned the Monasteries.* The schools that were not chosen and did not go away, and the Mongol princes who patronised them anyway.

10 — Change and Collapse. *Before the Dynasty That Made Them.* A client who lost his country fourteen years before his patron lost his, and a formula that was still being cited in 1913.

11 — The Grim Accounting. *The Road and the Translation.* A ledger in which the achievements are mostly texts and the costs are mostly labour.

12 — Convergence and Divergence. *The Fourth Position.* Four rulers, one problem, and a table that is now complete — with the strongest case for the arrangement, stated fully and answered.

LANDSCAPE

THE MOST LEARNED OF THEM ALL

Landscape · the two orders on the eve — a country with no government and four competing schools, an empire with no doctrine and a policy of exempting every clergy from tax, and a general asked to advise on which lama to send for

The country with no government

Tibet in 1240 had not had a central authority for four hundred years.

The Tibetan empire of the seventh to ninth centuries had been a serious military power — it had taken the Tang capital in 763 — and it had adopted Buddhism as a state religion under royal patronage, at Samye, in the reign of Trisong Detsen. That empire broke apart in the 840s. What followed in the Buddhist tradition's own account is a period of collapse and then a "later diffusion," in which the religion was reintroduced from India and from the western kingdoms and rebuilt from the bottom up, around teachers and their lineages rather than around a throne.

By the thirteenth century the result was a landscape of monastic estates and noble houses, in which several distinct schools had crystallised, each with its own transmission, its own great monasteries, its own lay patrons and its own territorial base. The Kadam, deriving from Atisha. The Kagyu, with its subdivisions — Drikung, Taglung, Phagmodru — descending from Marpa and Milarepa. The Nyingma, claiming the older transmission. And the **Sakya**, whose great monastery in Tsang had been founded in 1073 and whose abbotship was held on a **hereditary basis by the Khön family**.

Hold that last fact; the whole case turns on it.

There was no king. There was no capital. There was no army in the field. There was no institution with authority over any of the others. **What there was, was a set of religious lineages with land, tenants, wealth and prestige, in a country nobody governed.**

The recursion

And the Buddhism those lineages transmitted was, in the ordinary way of this collection, a former conquest naturalised.

It had arrived from India under royal sponsorship, been established at Samye against opposition from the older Bön priesthood and from a nobility whose interests it disturbed, and had been imposed with the resources of an imperial state. By 1240 nobody in Tibet experienced it as an import. Four centuries had made it the shape of the world, the calendar, the ethics, the language of learning and the ground of every claim. That it had been installed by a conquering monarchy did not make it less real; a thing that was built and then became real is a more durable object than a lie.

What is unusual is the *second* naturalisation. The imperial patronage collapsed and the religion did not. It was rebuilt without a state, on private transmission from teacher to disciple, funded by aristocratic households and monastic estates, and it therefore acquired a shape no state had designed: **plural, decentralised, hereditary or lineage-based in its leadership, and answerable to nobody.**

The empire with no doctrine

Against that stood a power in exactly the opposite condition.

The Mongol empire in 1240 was the largest land empire that had ever existed and it had no religion. The steppe cult of Tengri, the Eternal Blue Heaven, supplied a mandate — Chinggis and his house ruled by the decree of Heaven — but it supplied no clergy, no law, no scripture, no institution and no answer to any question a governed population would ask.

What it had instead was a policy, and the policy is one of the most consequential in this collection. **The Mongols exempted the clergy of every religion from taxation and corvée, and required them to pray for the ruling house.**

Chinggis had summoned the Daoist master Changchun and granted his order privileges. Ögödei extended similar exemptions. Buddhist, Daoist, Nestorian Christian, Muslim and later Confucian establishments all received them. Möngke is credited with the formulation that the different faiths are like the fingers of one hand.

Read that as a policy and not as a sentiment and its logic is exact. **A conqueror with no doctrine of his own, ruling many populations with incompatible doctrines, cannot borrow any one of them without alienating the rest — so he buys them all, cheaply, in the one currency every clergy wants, which is exemption.** The price is a line in the revenue accounts. The return is that every priesthood in the empire has a

reason to pray for the khan and no reason to preach against him.

It is the single cheapest legitimation strategy this collection has examined, and its weakness is that it produces no *particular* authority. Being prayed for by everyone is not the same as being authorised by somebody.

The advice

Which brings us to 1240 and to the sentence that opens this study.

A Mongol force under the general Doorda Darkhan entered Tibet: a campaign reported at thirty thousand troops and five hundred casualties, small by Mongol standards and of disputed purpose. It burned two monasteries and it did not conquer the country, because there was nothing to conquer in the sense the Mongols understood — no capital, no field army, no ruler to accept a surrender.

So the prince Köden, Ögödei's son, asked his general a different question: **whom should he send for?**

The advice Doorda Darkhan is reported to have given is preserved in the Tibetan tradition, and whatever its exact wording, its structure is the finding:

> *The Kadampas are the best regarding the monastic institution; the Taglungpas are the most skilled in worldly human affairs; in splendour, the Drikungpas are the greatest; but as for Dharma, Sakya Pandita is the most learned of them all.*

That is a **market survey**. A Mongol general was asked to report on the available suppliers of religious authority in a conquered country, and he graded them by institution, worldly competence, magnificence and learning.

And Turrell Wylie's observation about the choice that followed is the sharpest single point in the case. Sakya Pandita was not selected only for his learning. **Succession in the Sakya line ran hereditarily within the Khön family — and a hereditary succession is predictable.** A school led by a family produces a known successor. A school led by an elected abbot, or later by a recognised reincarnation, does not.

The Mongols went shopping for a clergy, and among the criteria was whether its leadership could be relied on to reproduce itself in a form the empire could deal with.

Reading the eve against the framework

On the recursion, with an addition. Tibetan Buddhism satisfies the ordinary condition — a conquest-installed doctrine, naturalised over four centuries into the furniture of the world. What it adds is a second phase this collection has not seen: **a naturalised order that lost its founding state and survived, rebuilding on private lineage transmission.**

That reshapes the thing permanently. An order rebuilt without a state has no office a state can occupy, no single hierarchy a ruler can capture, and no central authority whose endorsement is the endorsement. It becomes a *field* rather than an institution — which is what the Mongols found and what the market survey describes.

Which produces the contribution, and it is a mechanism none of the three preceding studies could have shown. Every ruler examined so far took the authorising institution he was given: the Seljuks a caliphate, the German emperors a papacy, Akbar a class of jurists who were the only jurists there were. **The Mongols could choose.** They had no doctrine of their own, they had conquered a country whose religious authority was distributed across four competing lineages, and no one of those lineages had any claim on them.

Where a conqueror has no doctrine and his conquest contains several competing suppliers of religious authority, he does not borrow — he selects; and the selection criterion will be the reliability of the supply rather than the truth of the doctrine. The reported criteria were institutional strength, worldly competence, splendour and learning. The operative one, on the best modern reading, was heritability.

That is a proposition worth carrying, because it inverts the usual assumption about religious patronage. A ruler choosing among clergies is not asking which is right. He is asking which will still be there, in a form he recognises, when the man he is dealing with dies.

A note on sources.

The collapse of the Tibetan empire in the 840s, the "later diffusion" of Buddhism, and the emergence of the Sakya, Kagyu, Kadam and Nyingma schools with their distinct transmissions are standard. The foundation of Sakya monastery in 1073 and the hereditary abbotship of the Khön family are standard.

The Mongol policy of exempting the clergy of all religions from taxation and corvée in exchange for prayers for the ruling house is standard, as are Chinggis's dealings with the Daoist master Changchun and the extension of exemptions under Ögödei. The

saying attributed to Möngke comparing the religions to the fingers of one hand is widely reported and is given here as attributed rather than verified against a text reproducing the original.

Doorda Darkhan's campaign of 1240 is reported at thirty thousand troops with five hundred casualties; those are the figures given in the standard accounts and both should be treated as orders of magnitude. The purpose of the campaign is described in the literature as unclear and still debated.

Doorda Darkhan's reported advice on which lama to invite is preserved in the Tibetan tradition and is quoted here in the form in which it is transmitted in the modern accounts; it is a report of a conversation recorded long afterwards and is used for its structure — a graded survey of available suppliers — rather than as verbatim testimony.

Turrell Wylie's argument that the hereditary character of Sakya succession was a political reason for Köden's choice, ensuring continuity of submission, is his and is followed here; the inference drawn from it about selection criteria generally is this study's.

MODULE 1

CONQUERED BY LETTER

Module 1 · the floor of force — a country taken by a circular addressed to its abbots, the census that made the taking real, and the army that arrived thirty years later to enforce it

The smallest conquest

The Mongol acquisition of Tibet is the least military conquest in this collection and the fact is structural rather than incidental.

The campaign of 1240 was small — thirty thousand men on the reported figure, five hundred casualties, two monasteries burned — and it settled nothing, because there was nothing in Tibet that a battle could settle. No capital to take, no king to depose, no field army to destroy, and a terrain in which a nomad cavalry's advantages are considerably reduced.

What followed instead was an invitation. Köden summoned Sakya Pandita, then in his sixties; the lama travelled with his two young nephews, arrived at Liangzhou in 1246 or 1247, and there negotiated the terms on which Tibet would submit.

And then he wrote a letter home.

The *Letter to the Tibetans* — addressed to the clergy and lay lords of the country — urged submission, set out what the Mongols required, and warned what would follow refusal. Its practical demands were the ordinary Mongol ones: a census, the enumeration of households, the delivery of tribute, the acceptance of officials, the provision of the relay-station service.

A country was brought into an empire by a circular addressed to its abbots, written by a monk who was in another country at the time, and whose only authority over the recipients was that they respected his learning.

That is not a floor of force. It is a floor of force *implied* — the demonstration of 1240 standing behind a letter, and a very shrewd estimate on Sakya Pandita's part of what would happen if the demonstration were repeated in earnest.

What made it real

The instrument that converted the letter into a government was not an army. It was a survey.

In 1252 Möngke sent envoys into Tibet to conduct a census and demarcate boundaries. A fuller enumeration followed in 1268, and it is that census which the sources treat as the beginning of implemented Mongol administration. Out of it came the division of Central Tibet into **thirteen myriarchies** — *khri skor*, notionally units of ten thousand households — each under a local lord titled *khri dpon*.

Alongside the census went the relay-station system, the *jam*, which is the Mongol empire's most characteristic administrative object: a chain of posts along the routes, maintained by the local population, supplying mounts, fodder and lodging to imperial messengers and officials. It is how the empire's information moved, and it is a permanent charge on the people who live beside it.

Count the households, divide them into units, name a responsible man for each, and run a road through them. That is the whole of Mongol government in a submitted territory, and it required almost no soldiers to maintain because the units were held by local lords whose position now depended on imperial recognition.

The army arrives late

Which is not to say force was absent. It arrived when the arrangement failed, and it arrived promptly.

In 1280 Phagpa died at Sakya, aged forty-five. A rumour — the sources describe it as unsubstantiated — held that he had been poisoned by Kunga Zangpo, the *dpon chen* or chief administrator, whom Phagpa had dismissed some years earlier for high-handed conduct.

In 1281 an army of Mongols and Amdo Tibetans entered Tibet. Kunga Zangpo was executed. The Mongol military presence in the country was substantially strengthened.

In 1285 the Drikung Kagyu rose against Sakya rule and burned Sakya monasteries; the rising was put down with Mongol help.

So the floor was real, it was held in reserve, and it was applied to the client's internal quarrels rather than to the population. The Mongol army in Tibet existed to keep the Sakya in place — including against a *dpon chen* the Sakya had themselves appointed — and that is a very different thing from an army of occupation.

What the arrangement actually was

Which allows the module's central question to be answered: who held organised violence, and over whom?

The Mongols held it, overwhelmingly and never seriously contested. The Sakya held none of their own; the *dpon chen* commanded what forces there were and was, as 1281 showed, removable by imperial troops. The myriarchs held local followings and could rebel, as the Drikung did, and could be crushed.

What the Sakya had instead was **the imperial recognition itself**, and it is worth being precise about the direction of dependence. A myriarch's position rested on being named in the imperial arrangement. The Sakya were the channel through which naming ran. That gave them enormous practical power over men with more soldiers than they had — and it existed entirely at the pleasure of a court in Khanbaliq, four months' travel away.

Reading the floor against the framework

The finding, and it identifies a mechanism the collection has not named. Every conquest examined so far worked by defeating something: an army at Dandānaqān, a city at Rome, a fortress at Chittor. This one worked by **demonstration and correspondence** — a small punitive campaign, followed by a letter from a respected man explaining what the alternative was.

That is available only under a specific condition, and the condition is the interesting part. **Where a country has no central authority to defeat, a conqueror cannot conquer it and must instead find somebody inside it whose word carries and persuade that person to write the letter.** The absence of a government makes the country militarily unconquerable in the ordinary sense and administratively very easy to acquire, because there is nobody with the standing to organise a refusal.

Which produces a proposition worth testing elsewhere: **a decentralised polity is expensive to conquer and cheap to co-opt, and a centralised one is the reverse.** Tibet had no throne to take and therefore no throne to defend; what it had was a small number of men whose letters other men read, and buying one of those is cheaper than any campaign.

And the second finding, on what the floor was actually for. The Mongol military presence in Tibet was not deployed against the Tibetan population, which was not resisting. It was deployed in 1281 against the Sakya's own chief administrator and in 1285 against a rival school.

A patron's army in a client's country is there to hold the client in place, and its principal enemies will be the client's own subordinates and rivals rather than the client's subjects. That is a structural prediction about indirect rule generally and this case supplies it in its clearest form: the first serious application of imperial force in forty years of Mongol rule over Tibet was to execute a man the Sakya themselves had appointed.

A note on sources.

The 1240 campaign under Doorda Darkhan, its reported strength of thirty thousand and five hundred casualties, and the burning of monasteries are treated in the Landscape with the same cautions; both figures are orders of magnitude.

Sakya Pandita's summons, his journey with his nephews, his arrival at Liangzhou in 1246 or 1247, and his *Letter to the Tibetans* urging submission are standard. The letter's substance — census, tribute, acceptance of officials, provision of the relay service — is as reported in the standard accounts; the text is not quoted here, no translation having been verified against the original for this study, and the study says so rather than paraphrasing it as though from the document.

Möngke's census envoys of 1252, the fuller enumeration of 1268, the division of Central Tibet into thirteen *khri skor* under *khri dpon*, and the relay-station system are standard. The notional character of the "myriarchy" as a unit of ten thousand households is standard and the actual sizes varied.

Phagpa's death at Sakya on 15 December 1280, the unsubstantiated rumour of poisoning by the former *dpon chen* Kunga Zangpo, the armed intervention of 1281 and Kunga Zangpo's execution, and the Drikung rising of 1285, are as reported in the standard accounts. The rumour is described as unsubstantiated in the sources themselves and is reported here as a rumour.

MODULE 2

THE THIRTEEN MYRIARCHIES

Module 2 · the settlement — what was actually granted and when, why the founding donation appears to have been written afterwards, and a hereditary abbotship the emperor eventually filled from outside the family

The story as it is told

The classic account of the Mongol-Sakya settlement is simple and appears in every summary. In 1253 the young Phagpa conferred a tantric initiation on Prince Kublai, and Kublai in gratitude granted him the three regions of Tibet — Ü-Tsang, Kham and Amdo. Religious authority was exchanged for temporal dominion. The patron-priest relationship was founded in that moment.

Recent research qualifies it heavily, and the qualification is the module's first finding.

Möngke had already divided Central Tibet into appanages under various Mongol princes in 1251, before the initiation. Those appanages were withdrawn around 1260, when Phagpa received the title of State Preceptor. The grant of the three *chol kha* to Phagpa in 1253 comes down through later Tibetan historiography and is not attested in a contemporary imperial document.

The sequence that the record supports is less dramatic and more instructive. A young lama attached himself to a prince in 1253 and gave him initiations. That prince became Great Khan in 1260 and made the lama his State Preceptor. In 1264 he established a Bureau of Buddhist and Tibetan Affairs and put the lama at the head of it. In 1268 he had Tibet surveyed and divided into thirteen myriarchies. In 1270 he raised the title to Imperial Preceptor and gave him a jade seal.

The authority accumulated over seventeen years, in stages, each attached to an imperial office — and was afterwards remembered as a single donation made in gratitude for a sacrament.

What the grant consisted of

Set out what the Sakya actually held and it is a bundle of offices rather than a territory.

The **Imperial Preceptor** — *dishi* — resided at the imperial court, supervised the Buddhist clergy of the whole empire, directed the Bureau of Buddhist and Tibetan Affairs, was authorised to issue letters and proclamations to the temples and institutions of Tibet, and advised the emperor on appointments there.

The **dpon chen** — the chief administrator — resided in Tibet and actually governed it, and was, in the working arrangement, nominated from Sakya and confirmed by the emperor.

The **myriarchs** held the thirteen units and were local lords, several of them attached to rival schools, holding their positions through imperial recognition.

Notice what is missing. There is no grant of land to the Sakya as a fief. There is no hereditary territorial title. There is no independent revenue. **What the Khön family received was appointment to an imperial office and the right to nominate to another, and the offices existed at the emperor's pleasure.**

Marks of that are visible throughout. Later scholarship is explicit that Phagpa and his successors were not literally viceroys, and that after Phagpa the offices of Sakya abbot and Imperial Preceptor were frequently held by different men. When Dharmapala Rakshita's branch of the family died out in the 1280s, **Kublai appointed a Sakya abbot and a Dishi neither of whom belonged to the Khön lineage**, and it was not until 1306 that a relative held it again.

The hereditary credential the Mongols had selected for its predictability turned out to be interruptible, and the emperor simply filled the post from outside.

The other side of the bundle

Against that, what the Mongols received should be stated with equal precision, because the arrangement was genuinely reciprocal and this study will spend a module on the fact.

They received a governed Tibet at almost no military cost: a census, thirteen units with named responsible men, a relay system, tribute, and a religious hierarchy with an interest in the arrangement's continuation.

They received a clergy for an empire that had none of its own — men who could perform rites for the dynasty, supervise the Buddhist establishments of China, and

supply the ruling house with the ritual services every court in Asia was expected to command.

And they received a **language of universal sovereignty** that was not Chinese. That is the item most often underrated. Kublai ruling China needed to be an emperor in Chinese terms and could not afford to be only that, since he was also Great Khan of a steppe empire and ruler of Central Asian Muslims. The Buddhist vocabulary of the *cakravartin*, the wheel-turning universal monarch, and the identification of the ruler with the bodhisattva of wisdom, gave him a claim that was universal, prestigious, ancient, and owned by nobody in China.

Reading the settlement against the framework

The first finding, on founding donations generally. The 1253 grant is the third instance in this sequence of a founding transaction that appears to have been composed afterwards, and the pattern is now clear enough to state.

A settlement's founding moment tends to be retold as a single voluntary exchange, and the record usually shows an accumulation of separate arrangements over years. The Seljuks were said to have been granted authority by the caliph and had in fact taken it first and been ratified in instalments over eighteen years. The Sakya were said to have been granted Tibet for an initiation and in fact received a series of imperial offices across seventeen. The retelling is not a lie invented by cynics; it is what a relationship looks like from inside once it has become the furniture of the world, and it performs a real function — **a single act of donation is transmissible to successors in a way that an accumulation of administrative decisions is not.**

Which yields a rule of reading: **where a founding donation is dated to a sacrament, look for the administrative decisions on either side of it.**

The second finding, and it is the one the case adds to the two-lever analysis this sequence has been building. The preceding studies established that an interpretive class's credential lives either in an office, and is therefore capturable, or in a person, and is therefore not. This case supplies a third location: **the credential lived in a family.**

The Khön had held Sakya since 1073 and passed it uncle to nephew. That is why the Mongols chose them, and it produces a position with properties belonging to neither of the earlier cases. A lineage credential is **predictable**, which is what a patron wants. It is **not capturable**, since a patron cannot make himself a Khön. And it is **interruptible in a way neither of the others is** — because families fail, and when Dharmapala's branch died out the arrangement did not survive its own logic. The emperor appointed outsiders, and the thing the Mongols had bought — a supply of authority that reproduced itself without their intervention — stopped reproducing itself and had to

be managed.

A hereditary credential trades capturability for fragility: the patron cannot take it, and he cannot replace it either, and he is therefore exposed to an accident of biology he has no instrument to prevent. What a patron does about that is the subject of Module 8, and what he does is exactly what one would expect.

A note on sources.

That the grant of the three *chol kha* to Phagpa in 1253 comes through later Tibetan historiography and is qualified by recent research, and that Möngke had divided Central Tibet into appanages under Mongol princes in 1251 with the appanage system withdrawn about 1260, follows the current scholarly accounts and is stated as a qualification rather than a refutation.

The sequence of Phagpa's appointments — the Hevajra empowerment of Kublai in 1253, State Preceptor (*guoshi*) in 1260, the Bureau of Buddhist and Tibetan Affairs in 1264 with Phagpa as its first director, the census and thirteen myriarchies of 1268, Imperial Preceptor (*dishi*) with a jade seal in 1270 — is standard. The full titulature conferred in 1270 is reported in the Chinese sources and is not quoted here in full.

That Phagpa and his successors were not literally viceroys, and that after Phagpa the offices of Sakya abbot and Imperial Preceptor were often separated, follows the modern scholarship. The extinction of Dharmapala Rakshita's branch of the Khön family, Kublai's appointment of a Sakya abbot and a Dishi from outside the lineage, and the restoration of a Khön relative in 1306, are as reported in the standard accounts.

The *cakravartin* ideal and the identification of the ruler with the bodhisattva of wisdom are standard elements of the Buddhist political vocabulary and are treated at length in the module on the robe.

MODULE 3

EACH AUTHORISED THE OTHER

Module 3 · the robe — a formula in which the priest crowns the patron and the patron enthrones the priest, why that is either the strongest or the weakest arrangement in this collection, and a description still being argued over in the twentieth century

The formula

The Tibetan term is *mchod yon*, a compound of two words: *mchod gnas*, the one worthy of offerings, and *yon bdag*, the master of gifts. Priest and patron. In the classic formulation the lama supplies religious instruction, initiation, ritual performance and legitimation; the ruler supplies protection, material support and administrative authority.

The Tibetan vocabulary for the underlying dyad is older than the Mongols — the pairing of *chos* and *srid*, religion and government, appears in Tibetan sources going back to the imperial period, and Phagpa was applying an existing frame rather than inventing one. What the Mongol relationship produced was its most elaborated form and the one every later arrangement in Inner Asia would cite.

And it is unlike anything else in this sequence, because the authorisation runs in both directions.

In the Seljuk case the caliph authorised the sultan; the sultan protected the caliph but did not confer his office, which came by descent from the Prophet's uncle. In the Latin case the pope claimed to authorise the emperor and the emperor claimed to invest bishops, and they fought for fifty years precisely because each denied that the other's claim was of the same kind. In the Mughal case the scholars attested to the emperor and the emperor granted them their land, and the second was straightforwardly a payment.

Here each party's position is genuinely constituted by the other. Kublai is a *cakravartin*, a wheel-turning universal monarch, and is associated with Mañjuśrī, the bodhisattva of wisdom — and it is Phagpa who says so, from within a tradition that has the standing to say it. Phagpa is Imperial Preceptor, head of the Bureau, holder of the jade seal, and nominator of the *dpon chen* — and it is Kublai who says so, from within an empire that has the force to make it stick.

Two men each holding a title the other conferred.

What each was actually buying

The exchange only makes sense if each party lacked something the other had, and both did.

Kublai lacked a universal religious sanction that was not Chinese. He was Great Khan of a steppe empire, emperor of a Chinese one, and overlord of Muslim Central Asia. The Chinese Mandate of Heaven was available and he took it, and it was insufficient: it is a claim intelligible in China and nowhere else, and it would have subordinated him to the Confucian literati who interpret it. Tengri supplied a mandate with no clergy. Buddhism supplied a vocabulary of universal kingship — the *cakravartin* who rules by the wheel of the Dharma rather than by any particular people's tradition — that was ancient, prestigious across Inner and East Asia, and owned by no constituency he had to govern.

Phagpa lacked any means whatever of making the Sakya pre-eminent in Tibet. The Khön had learning, a great monastery and a lineage. They had no army, no jurisdiction over the other schools, and no claim on the Drikung or the Phagmodru or the Taglung, all of whom had their own patrons, estates and followings. Nothing internal to Tibet could have made one school supreme, because the country's religious authority had been rebuilt after the empire's collapse in a form that had no top.

So each supplied the other with exactly the thing his own world could not generate. That is why the arrangement was stable for a century and why both sides described it in terms of mutual benefit rather than of subordination.

The problem with mutual authorisation

But look at it against the finding this sequence has established and a difficulty appears immediately.

An authorisation is worth having because the beneficiary could not have produced it. That is the property — the whole property — and it is why a caliph with no army was more useful than a caliph with one, and why Akbar could not authorise himself, and why Gregory VII spent his first paragraph swearing to Saint Peter that he had not wanted the office.

In a mutual arrangement, each party's authorisation is issued by somebody whose own position the first party conferred. Phagpa declared Kublai a *cakravartin*; Kublai had made Phagpa Imperial Preceptor. Kublai's title therefore rested on the word of a man who held his own title from Kublai.

That is a circle, and everybody could see it. The Chinese literati saw it. Later Tibetan critics of Sakya pre-eminence saw it. And the arrangement survived anyway, for a century, which requires explanation.

The explanation is that **neither party's authority actually rested on the circle.** Kublai's power rested on the largest army in the world; the Buddhist sanction was a supplement, in one register, for one set of audiences. Phagpa's standing as a scholar and a lineage-holder was independent of any imperial appointment; the Khön had been eminent since 1073 and would have remained so if no Mongol had ever come.

A mutual authorisation works while each party has a base the other did not supply, and becomes hollow the moment either party's position rests on nothing but the other's word. That is a testable proposition and this case tests it: the Sakya's position in Tibet came to rest more and more purely on imperial recognition, and when the imperial recognition weakened in the fourteenth century the Sakya were displaced by a myriarch with soldiers.

The description that is still contested

One further thing has to be said about *mchod yon*, and it belongs in a study of legitimating language rather than in a footnote.

The formula is not a neutral historical description. It is a **live political claim**, and it has been for a century.

At the Simla Conference of 1913 the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's negotiators invoked the priest-patron relationship to explain the absence of a demarcated boundary between Tibet and China: a religious benefactor, on that reading, is not a sovereign, and Tibet's historic relations with the Yuan and Qing courts were relations between a spiritual teacher and a lay patron rather than between a subject and a lord. The Tibetan government-in-exile and its scholarly allies have maintained that position. The Chinese state maintains the opposite, that the Yuan arrangement was administration of a Chinese territory.

And the academic position is a third thing. Elliot Sperling, Sam van Schaik, Melvyn Goldstein and others have argued that the political subordination of Tibet to the Yuan was apparent, that *mchod yon* as a symmetrical partnership oversimplifies, and that the framing obscures the dominance a far more powerful state exerted. Others hold that the arrangement genuinely preserved substantial Tibetan autonomy and that the Bureau of Buddhist and Tibetan Affairs was nominal in practice.

This study takes no position on the sovereignty question, which is not what it is for. What it can say is structural and applies to the formula rather than to the claim.

Mchod yon is a description of a relationship, generated principally by one party to it, in the vocabulary of that party's own tradition, and it describes an asymmetry of force as a symmetry of function. That is precisely what a legitimating description does, in every case this collection has examined, and identifying it as one is not an argument that it was false.

A description can be constructed and true. The lama really did confer initiations; the khan really did protect and endow; the relation really was understood in those terms by men on both sides who were not being cynical. What the framework insists on is only that the description performed work, that the work benefited both parties in different ways, and that the party with the smaller army had the larger interest in the terms being remembered as symmetrical.

Reading the robe against the framework

The finding, and it is a new form. Every authorisation in this sequence so far has run one way. This one runs both, and it produces a genuinely different object.

Mutual authorisation is not a stronger version of one-way authorisation but a different arrangement with a different failure mode. One-way authorisation fails when the issuer is captured, armed, compelled or bought — the Seljuk caliph, Gregory at Canossa, Akbar's signatories. **Mutual authorisation cannot fail in those ways, because neither party can capture an issuer who holds his own office from him.** It fails instead by *hollowing*: when one party's independent base erodes, the circle becomes visible, and a circle authorises nothing.

State the condition precisely, because it is what makes the arrangement work at all: **a mutual authorisation is load-bearing only for as long as both parties retain a source of standing that the other did not supply.** Kublai had an army. The Khön had a lineage four generations old before any Mongol arrived. Take either away and the whole formula collapses into two men certifying each other.

And the second finding, on legitimating descriptions that outlive their arrangements. *Mchod yon* was still being argued at a diplomatic conference in 1913 and is still being argued now. That is not an accident of Tibetan politics; it is a property of the instrument.

A description of a power relationship, once established in the vocabulary of a durable tradition, becomes an asset that can be invoked by later parties who were not present at its making — and the party that invokes it will characteristically be the weaker one, because the stronger party does not need a description of the relationship and the weaker one has nothing else. That is worth carrying as a general expectation: look for the survival of a founding formula in the mouths of the descendants of

whichever party held less force.

A note on sources.

The terms *mchod gnas* and *yon bdag* and the compound *mchod yon* / *yon mchod* are standard, as is the observation that the conceptual dyad of *chos* and *srid* appears in Tibetan sources going back to the imperial period and to Dunhuang materials — the study follows the survey literature on Buddhism and politics in the Tibetan cultural area for that point.

The identification of Kublai with the *cakravartin* ideal and the association with Mañjuśrī are standard in the accounts of the relationship; the study does not quote a specific text of Phagpa's for either and says so.

On the contested character of the *mchod yon* framing: the invocation by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's negotiators at the Simla Conference of 1913 is standard. Elliot Sperling's, Sam van Schaik's and Melvyn Goldstein's arguments that Tibetan political subordination to the Yuan was apparent, and that the symmetrical reading oversimplifies, are reported as the positions of named scholars. The contrary position, that the Bureau of Buddhist and Tibetan Affairs was nominal and Tibetan autonomy substantial, is likewise reported as held. **This study takes no position on the sovereignty question and its structural analysis of the formula is not intended as an argument on either side of it.**

The propositions that mutual authorisation fails by hollowing rather than by capture, and that a founding formula survives in the mouths of the weaker party's successors, are this study's.

MODULE 4

THE SCRIPT THAT NOBODY WROTE IN

Module 4 · formation — an emperor who switched off the only capturable credential in the world, a new alphabet decreed for an empire, and the debate in which one clergy was made to destroy another in front of the throne

The credential he turned off

The most important thing Kublai did about formation is a thing he declined to do, and it is invisible in every account that looks only at Tibet.

He ruled China. China possessed the single most effective instrument for capturing an interpretive class that any civilisation has ever built: the **civil service examination.** A candidate's authority came from passing an examination the state set, on a canon the state prescribed, marked by examiners the state appointed. It is the institutional credential in its purest form — more capturable than Latin ordination, because the state need not even control the men who confer it, only the questions.

The preceding study in this sequence noted the comparison the Qing would later make of it: a dynasty of conquest that funded the certificate, set the syllabus, and held the leash for two hundred and sixty-eight years.

Kublai switched it off.

The examinations were suspended and were not restored until 1315, more than half a century into Mongol rule in the north and thirty-six years after the fall of the Southern Song. When they were restored they were held six times over the dynasty's ninety-seven years, with quotas reserving a third of the places for Mongols and further places for the *semu* of Central and Western Asia, and they produced on the order of five hundred *jinshi* in total — a fraction of what the Song had produced in a generation.

Consider what that decision forecloses. A Chinese dynasty with the examination running has a self-recruiting, self-financing bureaucracy of men whose entire standing derives from a state credential, who are therefore committed to the state's cosmology, and who can be steered by adjusting a syllabus. Kublai gave that up, deliberately, and

the reason is in the same sources: the Mongols distrusted the system's capacity to empower Chinese elites.

He declined to capture the interpretive class of the population he was ruling, and imported one from a country of a few hundred thousand people instead.

That is the case's central act and it should be read as a trade rather than a blunder. The examination would have delivered him a captured Chinese clergy and would have delivered the Chinese literati a claim on the state — that it be governed on their terms, in their language, according to their canon, by men like them. Kublai was not a Chinese emperor and did not intend to become one. He took the smaller, foreign, uncapturable clergy over the larger, native, capturable one, because the capturable one came with a constitution attached.

A credential a ruler can capture is also a credential that can capture the ruler, and that is the finding this module exists to state.

The clergy he imported instead

What he got in exchange was structurally the opposite in every respect.

The Sakya credential was **hereditary**, held in the Khön family since 1073. It was **foreign**, belonging to a country with no capacity to press claims on the empire. It was **small**, a few lineages rather than a class of hundreds of thousands. It was **uncapturable** — no emperor can make himself a Khön — and correspondingly **it made no demands on how China should be governed**, because Tibetan Buddhism had no theory of Chinese administration and no interest in acquiring one.

That last property is the purchase. **A foreign clergy supplies legitimation without supplying a programme.** The literati would have told Kublai what a good emperor does. Phagpa told him he was a *cakravartin*, which is a compliment with no policy content whatever.

The debate of 1258

The instrument's usefulness was demonstrated before Kublai was even Great Khan, and the demonstration is the module's second finding.

In 1258 Kublai convened a debate between Buddhists and Daoists on the authenticity of the *Huahu jing* — the scripture claiming that Laozi had travelled west and become the Buddha, a text whose whole purpose is to subordinate Buddhism to Daoism. Phagpa argued for the Buddhist side and the Daoists lost. Daoist establishments suffered for it; the text was condemned.

Look at the shape of that event. **The emperor did not adjudicate a doctrinal question. He convened a contest between two clergies and enforced the result.** He was not a party; he had no view on whether Laozi went west; his role was to hold the ring and then to punish the loser.

Set it beside the *ʿIbādat Khāna* at Fatehpur Sikri three centuries later and the difference is exact. Akbar staged his own clergy's disagreements in order to reduce their standing, because they were the only clergy he had. Kublai staged a contest **between** clergies, in which the winner's standing was raised and the loser's destroyed, because he had several and could afford to spend one.

Where a ruler has only one interpretive class, publicity is his weapon against it. Where he has several, adjudication is his weapon over all of them — and adjudication is far stronger, because it makes the ruler the venue rather than merely the audience.

The script

The last and strangest instrument is the one that failed, and its failure is more informative than a success would have been.

At Kublai's request Phagpa designed a new writing system, completed around 1268 and promulgated by imperial decree in 1269. The '**Phags-pa script** — square, derived from the Tibetan alphabet, written vertically — was intended as a single script for the whole empire, capable of writing Mongolian, Chinese, Tibetan, Uyghur and Sanskrit alike.

It is an extraordinary object: an attempt to build, from scratch, a formation instrument for a multilingual empire. Not a doctrine, not a curriculum, not a clergy — a **medium**, in which everything the empire wanted written could be written, and which belonged to no constituency because it was new.

It was used. Imperial edicts, seals, coins, passports, inscriptions. Schools were established to teach it. It appears on objects across the empire's range and it is why we have a phonetic record of thirteenth-century Chinese.

And nobody wrote in it. It never displaced Chinese characters, never displaced the Uyghur-derived Mongolian script, and fell out of use essentially with the dynasty. The Ming had no reason to keep it and the Mongols reverted to what they had used before.

A script is the purest possible attempt to own a formation apparatus, and this is the record of one being decreed by the most powerful man on earth and simply not taking. The reason is not mysterious. Writing systems are held by the people who write, and the people who wrote in Kublai's empire were Chinese clerks with a canon in

characters and Uyghur scribes with a Mongolian orthography, neither of whom had any use for a new alphabet and both of whom would outlast any decree.

Reading formation against the framework

The first finding, and it is the sharpest thing this case contributes. The two-lever analysis this sequence has built asks where a credential lives — in an office, capturable; in a person, not. Kublai's decision shows that a ruler who has a choice may prefer the uncapturable one, and that the preference is rational.

A credential a ruler can capture is a credential that can capture the ruler, because the class it licenses acquires, through the same instrument, a claim on how the state is to be run. The Chinese examination would have given Kublai a bureaucracy he could steer and a constitution he would have had to accept — a canon defining what a ruler is, a class entitled to remonstrate, and a standard by which he could be found wanting. He declined both together, because they are one object.

Which produces a general proposition to set beside the earlier ones: **the value of capturing an interpretive class is not unconditional, and a conqueror who is not of the population's culture may rationally prefer a foreign clergy that legitimates without prescribing.** The test is whether the available credential comes with a theory of good government attached. Where it does, capturing it is submission dressed as control.

The second finding, on what a ruler with several clergies can do that a ruler with one cannot. Akbar had one interpretive class and could only reduce it, by making its disagreements public. Kublai had at least four — Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian, Muslim, with Nestorians besides — and could therefore *adjudicate between them*.

Adjudication is a stronger position than patronage and a far stronger one than publicity, because it makes the ruler the venue in which religious questions are settled without requiring him to hold any religious view. The convener of the debate of 1258 needed no opinion about Laozi. He needed only the power to enforce the outcome, and the willingness to let one clergy destroy another in his presence.

That is the strongest position available to any ruler in this collection, and its precondition is plurality. **A ruler is best placed with respect to religion when he has several religions and worst placed when he has one.**

And the third, from the script. The *'Phags-pa* alphabet is the collection's cleanest experiment in whether a formation apparatus can be created by decree. The answer is no, and the reason is that formation runs through people who already know how to do something and have no incentive to learn a replacement. **A ruler can decree a medium and cannot decree its use, because the users are the apparatus and they were**

formed before he issued the decree.

A note on sources.

The suspension of the civil service examinations under the Yuan and their restoration in 1315 under Renzong are standard, as are the quotas reserving places for Mongols and *semu*, the small number of sittings, and the small total of *jinshi* produced. The figures given — six sittings over ninety-seven years, on the order of five hundred *jinshi* — are those reported in the standard accounts and are given as such. That the Mongols distrusted the system's capacity to empower Chinese elites is the standard explanation and is reported as such.

The four-tier ordering of Mongols, *semu*, *hanren* and *nanren* is standard, though its degree of formal codification is questioned in recent work; the study relies only on the restriction of Han access to high office, which is not disputed.

The Buddhist-Daoist debate of 1258 on the *Huahu jing*, Phagpa's participation, and the Daoist defeat are standard. The scale of the consequences for Daoist establishments is variously reported and no figures are given here.

The *'Phags-pa* script's completion around 1268, its promulgation by decree in 1269, its intended use for the empire's languages, its actual use in edicts, seals, coinage and inscriptions, and its disuse after the dynasty are standard. Its value to modern historical phonology is likewise standard.

The comparison with the Qing examination system is drawn from the Qing study in this collection. The propositions that a capturable credential can capture the ruler, that adjudication is a stronger position than patronage, and that a medium can be decreed but its use cannot, are this study's.

MODULE 5

A THOUSAND INGOTS AND FIFTY-NINE THOUSAND BOLTS

Module 5 · the cost column — what an imported clergy actually cost, the exemption that was the real expense, and the country that paid for a road it did not use

The visible payments

The Chinese record of Phagpa's elevation in 1270 includes a figure, and figures of that kind are rare enough in this collection to be worth having. On his appointment as Imperial Preceptor he received a jade seal, **one thousand large ingots of silver and fifty-nine thousand bolts of silk.**

Treat that as an order of magnitude and it is still a very large sum — and it is also, in the accounts of an empire that had just conquered the Southern Song, a rounding error. That is the first thing to say about the cost of this arrangement. **The direct payments to the Tibetan establishment were conspicuous and cheap.**

Silk and silver are what the Mongol court paid everybody with. Ceremonial gifts on that scale were made to submitting rulers, to allied princes, to useful officials and to foreign embassies. What made this one different was not the amount but the object: a jade seal, which is an instrument of office, and a title, which is a permanent claim on the imperial establishment rather than a single disbursement.

The invisible expense

The real cost was the exemption, and it does not appear as a payment anywhere.

The Mongol policy of exempting clergy from taxation and corvée was empire-wide and applied to every religion. Under the Yuan, with Tibetan Buddhism enjoying particular favour and the Bureau of Buddhist and Tibetan Affairs supervising monastic establishments across China as well as Tibet from 1277, the exempt sector was very large indeed.

Every monastery exempted is an estate removed from the tax base, permanently, together with its tenants. In China, where the monastic establishment was already extensive and where the Yuan added generous new endowments, the cumulative subtraction over a century was substantial. The dynasty's chronic fiscal

difficulties — the paper currency inflation, the reliance on tax-farming by *semu* financiers, the resort to expedients — have many causes and this is among them.

Which sets up an instructive comparison with the case immediately preceding this one in the sequence. Akbar's scholars were on *madad-i maʿāsh*: state grants, for a lifetime, renewable, auditable, and — as that study showed — the single lever he had over them. **Kublai's clergy were on exemption, which is not a grant at all but a permanent negative entry**, and exemptions are far harder to withdraw than pensions, because withdrawing one is not a decision to stop paying but a decision to start taking.

A ruler who funds a clergy by exemption has bought a cheaper instrument and given up a lever. That is the cost column's first finding and the dynasty paid for it across the whole of its short life.

What Tibet paid

On the other side of the arrangement, the country being administered paid in the ordinary Mongol currencies and one extraordinary one.

The **census** of 1268 established the assessment. The **thirteen myriarchies** were the units against which tribute and service were reckoned. The **relay stations** were the heaviest single burden: a chain of posts along the routes into Tibet, maintained by the population beside them, supplying mounts, fodder, provisions and lodging to imperial couriers and officials in perpetuity.

The relay system deserves a sentence of its own because of its peculiar injustice. **It is a tax on a population for the maintenance of a communication network that carries other people's messages.** A Tibetan household beside a route supplied horses so that instructions from Khanbaliq could reach Sakya faster. Nothing came back down the road for them.

And there was the extraordinary payment, which is the one Tibetan sources emphasise and imperial ones do not: **the country supplied the empire with clergy.** Tibetan lamas at the Yuan court, Tibetan supervisors of Chinese monasteries, Tibetan rites performed for the dynasty. That is an export, and it was the basis of the whole arrangement.

What the Sakya paid

The client's own costs are the ones this collection usually finds most instructive, and here they are the costs of holding an office at somebody else's pleasure.

The Sakya hierarch had to be **in two places.** The Imperial Preceptor resided at court, four months from Tibet; the *dpon chen* governed in Tibet. Phagpa himself shuttled — at the court from his teens, sent to Tibet in 1264, returning to court, back to Sakya in 1276, dead there in 1280.

The office was **divisible and was divided.** After Phagpa, Sakya abbot and Imperial Preceptor were frequently different men, and when the Khön line faltered the emperor appointed outsiders to both.

And the position generated **enemies inside the client's own household**. The *dpon chen* actually governed and the hierarch nominally did; the two roles were bound to collide and they did, fatally, in 1280.

A client elevated by a distant patron acquires subordinates who do the work, and the subordinates will eventually notice that the patron is far away and the hierarch is not.

What was cheap

Finally, the saving, and it was enormous.

Nobody in Tibet had to be converted, coerced or garrisoned in the ordinary way. The population was Buddhist, the arrangement was made with Buddhist authorities in Buddhist terms, and the empire's demands — a census, tribute, the relay service, acceptance of appointed lords — were of a kind that requires clerks rather than soldiers.

The Mongol military presence in Tibet, until 1281, appears to have been slight. **A country the size of Western Europe was held for forty years, essentially, by an arrangement with one family and a road.**

That is the cheapest hold in this collection and it is worth naming as such. The Seljuks needed two armies. The Latin parties fought for fifty years. Akbar spent his life conquering. The Mongols acquired Tibet with a letter, a census and a title, and it cost them the exemption of a clergy they wanted to exempt anyway.

Reading the cost column against the framework

The first finding, on funding forms. This sequence has now examined three ways of paying an interpretive class and they sort by revocability. A **perpetual endowment** created by private founders cannot be quietly closed and gives the ruler no lever. A **state grant with a term** can be audited and withdrawn and gives him the strongest lever available. An **exemption** is the cheapest of the three and gives him the weakest lever of all — weaker even than the endowment, because an endowment at least involves property that a determined state can seize, while an exemption is simply an absence from a ledger, and reversing it means levying a new tax on a religious establishment in public.

Rank the instruments by what it costs the ruler to reverse them, and exemption is the most expensive to undo and the cheapest to grant — which is exactly why rulers grant it and exactly why they regret it.

The second finding, on indirect rule's true price. The arrangement looks almost free from the imperial side and the appearance is deceptive, because the costs were displaced rather than avoided.

They were displaced onto the population beside the roads, who maintained a communications system for other people's messages. They were displaced onto the tax base of China, through an exemption granted for reasons that had nothing to do with China. And they were displaced onto the client, who had to hold an office at a four-month distance from the country it governed, and who was killed by his own chief administrator within four years of the arrangement reaching its full form.

A cheap hold is not a hold that costs nothing; it is a hold whose costs fall on parties who are not consulted about the arrangement and who do not appear in its accounts.

A note on sources.

The gifts on Phagpa's elevation in 1270 — a jade seal, one thousand large ingots of silver and fifty-nine thousand bolts of silk — are as reported in the Chinese record; both quantities are given here as reported and are not independently verified. No other figures are given in this module.

The Mongol exemption of clergy from taxation and corvée, its empire-wide application to all religions, and the extension of the Bureau of Buddhist and Tibetan Affairs' jurisdiction to Buddhist monasteries within China in 1277 are standard. The connection between monastic exemption and Yuan fiscal difficulty is one factor among several in the standard accounts and is presented here as such rather than as the

principal cause; the paper currency inflation and reliance on tax-farming have their own literatures.

The census of 1268, the thirteen myriarchies and the relay-station system are treated in Modules 1 and 2. That the relay stations were maintained by the adjacent population is standard.

Phagpa's movements — at the Mongol court from his youth, sent to Tibet in 1264, returning to court, back at Sakya from 1276, dying there on 15 December 1280 — are standard, as is the frequent separation of the offices of Sakya abbot and Imperial Preceptor after him. The conflict with the *dpon chen* Kunga Zangpo is treated in Module 1.

The ranking of funding instruments by cost of reversal is this study's, drawing on the *waqf* and *madad-i maʿāsh* comparisons developed in the two preceding studies in this sequence.

MODULE 6

THE CENSUS OF 1268

Module 6 · extraction — what was actually taken from Tibet, why the answer is less than the arrangement implies, and the difference between administering a country and holding a road through it

The count

Extraction in a Mongol territory begins with an enumeration, and Tibet was enumerated twice: envoys sent by Möngke in 1252, and the fuller census of 1268 which the sources treat as the start of implemented administration.

What a Mongol census counts is households — *hor dud* in the Tibetan reckoning — and what it produces is a set of units against which obligations can be assessed. Central Tibet emerged from the 1268 count divided into thirteen **myriarchies**, each notionally ten thousand households and in practice a good deal less, each under a *khri dpon* answerable through the *dpon chen* to Sakya and through Sakya to the Bureau.

The obligations attached were the standard imperial set: **tribute** in kind and specie, **the relay service**, **military levies** when required, and the recognition of appointed officials. A revision of the census was carried out in 1287 to establish a sounder fiscal base after a remission of taxes.

What was not taken

And now the observation that governs the module, because it cuts against the shape the arrangement suggests.

Tibet was not, on the evidence, a significant source of imperial revenue.

It is a high, cold, thinly populated country with a pastoral and barley economy, four months from the capital, across terrain that makes the movement of bulk goods ruinous. There is no equivalent of the Sawād, no Bengal, no Yangtze delta. Whatever the thirteen myriarchies yielded, it was not a material addition to the revenues of an empire that had just taken the richest agricultural region on earth from the Southern Song.

So the extraction question has to be asked differently here than in the other cases in this collection. **What was the empire taking, if not money?**

Three things, and none of them is fiscal.

A frontier that did not need holding. Tibet borders the Chinese west. An unadministered Tibet is a source of raiding, of refuge, and of the kind of trouble that requires garrisons. An administered one, held through a client, is a quiet flank.

A road. The relay system through Tibet connected the empire's western regions and gave the court information and reach. That is worth maintaining independently of what the country pays.

And the clergy itself, which is the export the whole arrangement existed for.

The direction of the flow

Which produces a genuinely unusual result for this collection: **it is not clear that the extraction ran net from Tibet to the empire at all.**

Against the tribute and the relay service, set the imperial expenditure: the gifts to Phagpa and his successors, the endowments of Tibetan establishments, the maintenance of Tibetan clergy at court, the subsidy of monasteries, the costs of the 1281 intervention and the garrisons that followed it, and the administrative apparatus of the Bureau.

Tibetan sources emphasise the inflow and imperial sources the submission, and each is describing the half of the transaction that suits it. The honest position is that **the arrangement was probably not profitable to the empire in fiscal terms and was not intended to be.**

That is worth stating plainly because it is rare. Almost every case in this collection is, at bottom, an extraction machine wearing a doctrine. This one is a **legitimation purchase wearing an administration** — and the administration was real, and burdensome to the people who bore it, and its purpose was not to collect.

Who bore it

The burden fell, as always, on people who appear in no account of the relationship.

The household beside a relay station supplied mounts, fodder, provisions and shelter, at its own cost, indefinitely, for messages it could not read carrying instructions it had no part in. The tenants of a myriarchy paid the assessment through a *khri dpon* whose position depended on imperial recognition and who therefore had every reason to deliver and none to remit. The monastic estates that were exempted did not pay,

which means their share fell on those who were not.

And the country acquired, for the first time in four centuries, a government — with all that implies about a population that had previously answered to a local lord and now answered to a local lord who answered upward.

Reading extraction against the framework

The finding, and it is a corrective to the collection's own habit. This series has repeatedly found extraction underneath doctrine and has been right to look. This case shows that the inference does not always run.

Where a territory is poor, distant and strategically useful, a conqueror may administer it at a net loss and the administration will still be worth having — for the frontier, for the road, and for whatever the territory produces that is not a commodity. Here that last was a clergy, which is the strangest export in this collection and the one the whole arrangement was built for.

Which yields a rule for reading such cases: **ask what the territory exports that could not be bought elsewhere.** If the answer is grain or silver, the doctrine is probably a wrapper on an extraction machine. If the answer is legitimacy, priests, horses or a frontier, the extraction may be genuinely incidental and the wrapper may be the substance.

And the second finding, on what administration does even when it takes little. The people beside the roads paid heavily in labour and animals for a system that carried nothing to them. The assessment was collected through lords whose tenure depended on collecting it. The country was counted, divided, named and made legible.

A light fiscal burden is not a light government. The measure of what an administration costs a population is not the size of the assessment but the amount of the population's own capacity that is redirected to serving the administration's needs — and a relay system is the purest possible instance, since it consumes labour and animals continuously and returns nothing that a household could use.

A note on sources.

Möngke's census envoys of 1252, the census of 1268 as the beginning of implemented administration, the division into thirteen myriarchies under *khri dpon*, and the revision of the census in 1287 following a tax remission ordered by Kunga Zhonnu are as reported in the standard accounts.

The notional character of the myriarchy as ten thousand households, and the fact that actual sizes varied considerably, are standard. **No figures are given in this module**

for the population of Tibet, for the yield of any myriarchy, or for the total tribute, because the surviving material supports none.

The relay-station system and its maintenance by the adjacent population are standard across the Mongol empire. The obligations of tribute, relay service, military levy and acceptance of appointed officials are the standard imperial set and are reported as such.

The judgement that Tibet was not a significant source of imperial revenue is an inference from its geography, economy and distance rather than a figure from a source, and is marked as an inference. The claim that the arrangement was probably not fiscally profitable to the empire is likewise offered as a judgement and not as a computation; no attempt is made here to price the imperial expenditure against the tribute.

MODULE 7

WRITTEN LONG AFTERWARDS

Module 7 · information and suppression — an arrangement recorded almost entirely by one side, a century after it ended, and the specific way that changes what can be known about it

The archive that isn't there

The information problem in this case is the reverse of the Mughal one and it is more serious.

Akbar's reign produced two great narratives from inside the same court, written by men who knew each other, disagreeing about everything. The Investiture Contest produced a pamphlet war in several volumes with both sides represented. The Seljuk empire left coins and a legal literature.

This case left very little contemporary documentation of the relationship itself.

The imperial side is recorded in Chinese: the *Yuan shi*, the dynastic history, compiled under the Ming in 1370 — that is, immediately after the dynasty fell, by its successors, from records that had survived a collapse. It is an administrative record and it treats Tibet as a matter of bureaus, appointments and titles, which is how a Chinese chancery would treat it.

The Tibetan side is recorded in Tibetan historiography, and the crucial fact about that historiography is **when it was written.** The great narrative sources for this period — the *Deb ther dmar po*, the Red Annals, from the mid-fourteenth century; the *Rgya bod yig tshang* of 1434; the *Deb ther sngon po*, the Blue Annals, of the 1470s — are all later, several of them by a century or more, and all of them are written from within a Tibetan Buddhist tradition with strong views about what the relationship had been.

So the arrangement's own account of itself comes to us mostly from one party, mostly after the other party had ceased to exist.

What that produces

The consequence is visible at the case's most famous point and this study has already had to deal with it.

The donation of the three regions of Tibet to Phagpa in 1253, in gratitude for a tantric initiation, is the founding scene of the whole relationship as it is usually told. It comes through later Tibetan historiography. It is not attested in a contemporary imperial document. And the administrative record shows Möngke dividing Central Tibet into appanages under Mongol princes in 1251, two years earlier, and those appanages being withdrawn about 1260 when Phagpa received his first imperial title.

The likeliest reconstruction — and it is a reconstruction — is that authority accumulated in stages across seventeen years and was afterwards remembered as a gift.

That is not fabrication and should not be described as such. It is what a relationship looks like from the inside once it has become the order of things: the initiation was real, the elevation was real, the connection between them was felt by everyone concerned, and compressing seventeen years of administrative decisions into one moment of gratitude is how human memory works on institutions. It is also, as the module on the settlement noted, considerably more useful — a donation is transmissible to successors in a way that a series of bureau appointments is not.

But it means a specific methodological discipline is required, and this study has tried to apply it: **where the Tibetan tradition gives a founding act and the administrative record gives a sequence, report both and prefer the sequence for chronology while taking the founding act seriously as evidence of what the arrangement became.**

The suppression that did not happen

Against that, what was actually suppressed in this order is a short list and an informative one.

The Daoists, after the debate of 1258 and the further proceedings that followed: their scripture condemned, establishments transferred, texts burned. That is the one clear case of religious suppression in the reign and it was done at the request of one clergy against another, adjudicated by the throne.

Kunga Zangpo, executed in 1281 for a poisoning the sources themselves call unsubstantiated.

The Drikung, whose 1285 rising was crushed and whose monasteries suffered.

And that is close to all of it. There was no doctrinal police, no register of belief, no inquisition, no attempt to impose Tibetan Buddhism on the Chinese population, no persecution of Islam or Christianity, and no requirement that anybody believe anything.

The Mongol state suppressed clergies that lost contests and clients that misbehaved, and left belief entirely alone, which follows exactly from the policy the Landscape described: a ruler who exempts every clergy in exchange for prayers has no interest in what anybody believes and a strong interest in all of them continuing to pray.

The outbound apparatus

What the state did build was a very good system for moving instructions, and the relay network is the point.

The Mongol empire's *jam* is the most effective pre-modern communications system anybody constructed, and it is the reason a court in Khanbaliq could nominate a *dpon chen* in Tibet and expect the nomination to hold. **The Bureau of Buddhist and Tibetan Affairs was an information institution before it was an administrative one**: its function was to know who held what in Tibet and to issue documents accordingly.

Set that beside the Seljuk finding — an order with maximal broadcast and no collection, killed by a network it could not see — and the Mongol position is the opposite and both axes are strong. They could collect: censuses, household counts, revisions when the base proved unsound. They could transmit: the relay system, the seals, the Bureau. And they added a third thing neither of the earlier cases had, which is the *'Phags-pa* script — an attempt to control the *medium* itself, which failed.

A state that can count and can transmit does not need to watch, because a client whose position depends on a document from a bureau that knows what he holds is already supervised.

Reading the seam against the framework

The finding, and it is a source-critical one that the collection needs. Three of the four cases in this sequence have now produced a founding transaction that the record dissolves into a sequence: the caliph's grant to Tughril, the papal donation traditions, and the Mongol donation of Tibet. The pattern is regular enough to state as an expectation.

Where a legitimating relationship is recorded principally by the weaker party and principally after the stronger party has gone, expect the founding moment to be a single voluntary donation and expect the administrative record to show an accumulation. The direction of the distortion is predictable, because a donation implies a donor who chose freely, and a party remembering a relationship it wants understood as voluntary has every reason to remember a gift rather than a series of appointments.

The corrective is not to disbelieve the tradition. It is to **ask separately what happened and what the relationship became**, and to notice that the second is a real fact about the world even where the first is different.

And the second finding, on suppression in a plural order. This state suppressed less than any other in the collection, and the reason is not tolerance in the modern sense but the structure of its patronage. **A ruler who patronises every clergy has no doctrine to protect and therefore nothing to police; what he polices instead is the outcome of contests between clergies, and the losers.**

The Daoists were not suppressed for being wrong. They were suppressed for losing a debate the emperor had convened. That is a different mechanism from anything else in this sequence and it produces a different distribution of victims: not heretics, not dissenters, not a population, but **an institution that came second in an adjudication.**

A note on sources.

The *Yuan shi*, compiled under the Ming in 1370, is the principal Chinese record for the period and its character as a hastily compiled successor-dynasty history from surviving archives is standard. The principal Tibetan narrative sources — the *Deb ther dmar po* (Red Annals) of the mid-fourteenth century, the *Rgya bod yig tshang* of 1434, and the *Deb ther sngon po* (Blue Annals) of the 1470s — are dated as reported, and their lateness relative to the events is the point relied on here.

The qualification of the 1253 donation tradition by recent research, and Möngke's appanage division of 1251, are treated in Module 2 with the same sources.

The Buddhist-Daoist debate of 1258 and its consequences are treated in Module 4. The execution of Kunga Zangpo in 1281 and the Drikung rising of 1285 are treated in Module 1. In each case the sources describe the poisoning rumour as unsubstantiated and this study repeats that.

The Mongol relay system, the Bureau of Buddhist and Tibetan Affairs, and the *'Phags-pa* script are treated in Modules 1, 2 and 4.

The proposition about the predictable direction of distortion where a relationship is recorded by the weaker party after the stronger party's disappearance is this study's,

generalising from the three instances noted.

MODULE 8

FIVE FURTHER WIVES

Module 8 · elite coordination and the default — a credential that reproduced itself biologically, an emperor who found that biology unreliable, and the arrangement by which a court in Khanbaliq took charge of a Tibetan family's marriages

Two succession problems, not one

Every case in this collection has a succession problem. This one has two, running simultaneously, in two different systems, and their interaction is the module's subject.

The Mongol succession was the more violent. The empire had no rule beyond the *quriltai*, the assembly of princes, and no principle of primogeniture; every khan's death was a contest. Kublai himself took the throne in 1260 by having himself proclaimed at Shangdu against his brother Ariq Böke, who was proclaimed at Karakorum, and the resulting civil war ran four years and permanently fractured the empire into competing khanates.

The Sakya succession was the more fragile. The Khön family held the abbotship of Sakya hereditarily and had since 1073, passing it typically from uncle to nephew, since the holders were monks. That arrangement depends on the family producing, in each generation, at least one son who does not take monastic vows and who fathers the next generation.

Both problems were live throughout the period and each made the other worse.

What the patron did about it

And here is the fact that gives the module its title and that has no parallel in any other case in this collection.

Dharmapala Rakshita, Phagpa's nephew, vacated the Imperial Preceptorship in 1286 and died on the way back to Tibet in December 1287. He had married a granddaughter of Köden and a lady of Zhalu; his one son died at the age of five. **That branch of the Khön family died out.**

Kublai's response was to appoint a Sakya abbot and an Imperial Preceptor from outside the lineage. It was not until 1306 that a relative held Sakya again.

That relative was Zangpo Pal, brought out of obscurity at the initiative of the *dpon chen* Aglen, who convened a council at Sakya, sent a petition to the Imperial Preceptor at Beijing, and had the matter laid before the great khan Temür, who approved it.

And then Temür did something remarkable. **He provided Zangpo Pal with a Mongol princess, Müdegen — and ordered him to marry five further wives from the highest nobility of Tibet.**

Read that as an administrative measure, which is what it was. The empire had selected a clergy on the criterion that its leadership reproduced predictably. The reproduction had failed once and nearly ended the arrangement. So the court **took charge of the breeding**: an imperial marriage to bind the lineage to the dynasty, and five more to bind it to the Tibetan nobility and to guarantee heirs.

Zangpo Pal is reported to have been a rustic figure with a bad temper and foul language. He was also, by the time he died around 1323, the father of a great many sons — and those sons, distributed among the palaces of Sakya, are a substantial part of why the Sakya position fell apart in the following generation.

The instrument turning on itself

Because the fix produced the failure.

Sakya came to be organised around several palaces, each with its own abbot, and the actual abbot-ruler holding only nominal superiority over the others. Internal unity weakened. And with the Sakya elite divided among competing branches of one over-supplied family, it became unable to prevent increasing unrest in the myriarchies.

An emperor solved a shortage of heirs by commanding a surplus of them, and the surplus split the institution he had been trying to preserve.

That is a very clean demonstration of a general problem and it deserves stating as one. A hereditary credential fails in two directions and the remedies are opposite. **Too few heirs and the lineage ends; too many and it fragments** — and a patron intervening from outside will characteristically over-correct, because the failure he has just witnessed is the one he is guarding against and the other is invisible until it arrives twenty years later.

The other coordination problem

Meanwhile the arrangement's working structure contained a fault line that killed the man who designed it.

The Imperial Preceptor resided at court and held the prestige. The *dpon chen* resided in Tibet and held the administration. The first nominated the second and the emperor confirmed him; the second actually governed and commanded what force there was.

That is a division of labour with an obvious failure mode and it failed on schedule. Phagpa dismissed Kunga Zangpo for high-handed conduct; Phagpa died in 1280 amid a rumour of poisoning; Kunga Zangpo was executed by imperial troops in 1281.

A client who governs through a subordinate while himself residing four months away has created a rival, and the rival's advantage is proximity. The *dpon chen* is in the country. The hierarch is at court. Everyone in Tibet who needs a decision goes to the man who is there.

The default

So what happened when nobody was enforcing?

The answer is that **the arrangement had no default at all**, and this is where it differs most sharply from the Seljuk case.

There, a source of title with no succession rule nonetheless solved the coordination problem one level up: it made the *dynasty* uncontestable, so that for a century and a half nobody outside the family successfully claimed the sultanate, and even a *ghulām* who ruled Khurasan for twenty years did it in a Seljuk's name.

Here there was no equivalent. The Sakya's pre-eminence in Tibet rested on nothing but imperial recognition. It was not rooted in Tibetan practice, since Tibet had never had a supreme religious authority. It was not rooted in the other schools' consent, since they had never given any and the Drikung had risen in 1285. It was not rooted in force, since the Sakya had none of their own.

Remove the imperial recognition and there is no residue — no rule that only a Khön may rule Tibet, no expectation among armed men that a rival would be resisted by all, nothing. That is exactly what happened in the 1350s, and it happened *before* the empire that supplied the recognition had fallen.

Reading the default against the framework

The first finding, and it completes the credential-location analysis. This sequence has established that a credential lodged in an office is capturable and a credential lodged in a person is not. This case supplies the third location and its distinctive pathology.

A credential lodged in a family is predictable, uncapturable, and hostage to biology — and a patron who has selected it for its predictability will find himself managing the family's marriages, because that is the only instrument he has. He cannot make himself a member. He cannot appoint from outside without destroying the property he bought. So when the line falters he does what Temür did: supplies a princess, commands five more wives, and hopes.

State it generally: **whoever depends on a hereditary institution acquires an interest in its reproduction and, having no other lever, will intervene in it — and such interventions fail asymmetrically, because a patron guarding against extinction will produce fragmentation.**

The second finding, on the residue of an imposed pre-eminence. The Seljuk arrangement left a residue: after the caliph's investitures, only a Seljuk could be sultan, and that expectation held for generations. The Sakya arrangement left none.

The difference is where the pre-eminence came from. **A pre-eminence that grows out of a society's own arrangements leaves an expectation behind it when its sponsor withdraws; a pre-eminence conferred entirely from outside evaporates with the sponsor's attention, because nobody inside ever agreed to it.**

That is the test to apply to any client elevated by a foreign patron: **ask what the client would have been without the patron, and that is what the client will be again.** The Khön were an eminent lineage with a great monastery in Tsang before 1244, and after 1354 that is exactly what they were once more — which is not nothing, and is not the rule of Tibet.

A note on sources.

Kublai's proclamation at Shangdu in 1260 against Ariq Böke at Karakorum, the four-year civil war, and the fracturing of the empire into competing khanates are standard.

The Khön family's hereditary abbotship of Sakya since 1073 and its typical transmission from uncle to nephew are standard.

Dharmapala Rakshita's vacating of the Imperial Preceptorship in 1286, his death at Tre Mandala on 24 December 1287, his marriages to a granddaughter of Köden and to a lady of Zhalu, the death of his son Ratnabhadra at the age of five, and the consequent

extinction of that branch of the Khön family are as reported in the standard accounts, as is Kublai's appointment of a Sakya abbot and a Dishi from outside the lineage and the restoration of a Khön relative in 1306.

Zangpo Pal's dates (1261–1323), his recall from obscurity at the initiative of the *dpon chen* Aglen, the council at Sakya, the petition to the Dishi Drakpa Odzer, Temür's approval, his arrival at Sakya in 1298, the provision of the Mongol princess Müdegen, and the order that he marry five further wives from the highest Tibetan nobility, are as reported in the standard accounts. The characterisation of him as a rustic figure with a bad temper and foul language is likewise as reported and comes through the Tibetan tradition.

The organisation of Sakya into several palaces each with its own abbot, the nominal superiority of the abbot-ruler, and the weakening of internal unity with consequent inability to control the myriarchies, follow the same accounts. The causal connection drawn here between Temür's marriage order and the later fragmentation is this study's inference and is marked as such.

The conflict between Imperial Preceptor and *dpon chen*, and Kunga Zangpo's dismissal, the poisoning rumour and his execution, are treated in Module 1.

MODULE 9

THE DRIKUNG BURNED THE MONASTERIES

Module 9 · plurality or foreclosure — the schools that were not chosen and did not go away, the Mongol princes who patronised them anyway, and the country that had never had a supreme authority and did not acquire one

The unchosen field

The market survey with which this study opened named four suppliers and the empire bought one. The other three remained in business.

The Kadam, the Taglung, the Drikung — and behind them the Phagmodru, the Karma Kagyu, the Nyingma and others — kept their monasteries, their estates, their lineages, their teachers and their lay patrons. Nothing in the Mongol arrangement abolished them. **The Sakya were given pre-eminence, not monopoly**, and there is a considerable difference.

The Drikung demonstrated it in 1285 by rising against Sakya rule and burning Sakya monasteries, and had to be put down with Mongol help. That is a school with soldiers, four decades into an arrangement that had supposedly settled who ruled Tibet.

Where a patron selects one supplier from a competitive field, the field does not close. It acquires a grievance.

The other patrons

And the grievance found sponsors, because the empire was not one thing either.

The Mongol imperial house was a family of princes with appanages, followings and rival interests, and its members patronised Tibetan schools on their own account. Möngke had divided Central Tibet into appanages under various princes in 1251 — a fact this study has already used to qualify the founding donation — and those princes formed attachments. The Karma Kagyu found favour with several Mongol figures. Later, the Ilkhanid and other lines had their own Tibetan connections.

The result is a structure with no parallel elsewhere in this collection. **The client's rivals were sponsored by the patron's rivals**, and each Tibetan school's fortunes

tracked the fortunes of a Mongol faction.

That is the real source of plurality in this order, and it should be named for what it is: not a design, not a concession, and not a right. It is a by-product of the fact that **the empire was itself plural, and a plural patron cannot enforce a monopoly on behalf of one client.**

What a Tibetan could do

Grade the recourse, as in the other studies.

A rival school could seek an alternative Mongol patron, keep its estates, maintain its lineage, and — as the Drikung showed — fight. That is real and substantial liberty, and it existed because the Sakya's pre-eminence was administrative rather than doctrinal. Nobody had declared the other schools wrong.

A myriarch held a unit of the settlement and could obstruct, delay, rebel, or attach himself to a different faction at court. The thirteen myriarchies were held by lords of several affiliations and the arrangement required their cooperation.

The dpon chen could accumulate the actual power of government and, on one reading of 1280, kill the man who had appointed him.

A monastery held its estates, its tenants and its exemption, and the exemption came from the empire rather than from Sakya, which meant it did not depend on Sakya's favour.

A Tibetan peasant could do nothing. He supplied the relay stations, paid the assessment through his myriarch, and appears in the record as a number in a census.

What was foreclosed

Against all that, one thing was closed and it is the thing that matters most for what followed.

Tibet did not acquire a native supreme authority, and the arrangement made it harder to acquire one.

The Sakya pre-eminence was not a Tibetan institution. It was an imperial appointment, exercised through an imperial bureau, enforced by imperial troops when it came to that. It gave the country something it had lacked for four centuries — a single address — and it gave it in a form that belonged to somebody else.

So when the empire's attention faded, Tibet did not revert to a weakened central authority. It reverted to no central authority, and had to build one from scratch, which is what Changchub Gyaltsen did in the 1350s and what every

subsequent Tibetan regime has had to do again.

That is the foreclosure, and it is subtle: not the suppression of an alternative but the **occupation of a position by something that could not be inherited.** For a century the answer to "who leads Tibet" was "whoever the emperor recognises," and a century of that answer prevents any other from developing.

Reading liberty against the framework

The first finding, and it is a fourth generator of plurality to set beside the three the collection has. The Seljuk case found counterweights arising from the technical form of institutions, authored by nobody. The Investiture case found counterweights bought in a bidding war between two authorities. The Mughal case found counterweights existing because the ruler's instruments were confessionally shaped and most subjects were outside their reach.

This case supplies: **counterweights that persist because the patron is itself plural.**

The signature is distinctive. The liberties are **factional** — they belong to whoever can attach themselves to a rival prince, and they rise and fall with that prince's fortunes. They are **not durable across a change in the patron's structure**: consolidate the empire and they vanish; fragment it and they multiply. And they protect **institutions rather than persons**, since what a rival prince patronises is a monastery or a school, not an individual with a grievance.

State it generally: **a client cannot be given a monopoly by a patron who does not have one.** Where the patron is a coalition, a family of princes, a set of factions, the client's rivals will find sponsors inside it, and the resulting plurality is real, is unintended, and lasts exactly as long as the patron's own division does.

And the second finding, on the cost of an imported supremacy. The Sakya were made pre-eminent by an outside power and the pre-eminence left nothing behind. That is worth stating as a general expectation because it applies to every case of indirect rule this collection is likely to meet.

An authority conferred from outside occupies the position a native authority would otherwise have had to build, and prevents it being built, without leaving anything in its place when the conferring power withdraws. The country is not returned to its former condition; it is returned to its former condition *having lost a century in which it might have developed something else*, and having acquired a memory of unity that no longer has an institution attached to it.

A note on sources.

The survival and continued activity of the Kadam, Kagyu (including Drikung, Taglung and Phagmodru), Karma Kagyu and Nyingma schools under Sakya pre-eminence is standard. The Drikung rising of 1285 and the burning of Sakya monasteries, put down with Mongol assistance, are as reported in the standard accounts.

Möngke's division of Central Tibet into appanages under Mongol princes in 1251 is treated in Module 2. That individual Mongol princes and later Mongol lines formed attachments to particular Tibetan schools, including the Karma Kagyu, is standard; no specific patronage relationship is relied on here beyond the general pattern, and the study does not attempt to trace the factional alignments in detail.

The affiliations of the myriarchs to various schools, and the requirement of their cooperation, follow the standard accounts of the thirteen *khri skor*.

Changchub Gyaltsen and the Phagmodrupa displacement of Sakya in the 1350s are treated in the module on collapse.

The four generators of plurality are drawn from the four studies in this sequence; the proposition that a client cannot be given a monopoly by a patron who does not have one, and the proposition about an imported supremacy occupying and preventing a native one, are this study's.

MODULE 10

BEFORE THE DYNASTY THAT MADE THEM

Module 10 · change and collapse — a client who lost his country fourteen years before his patron lost his, a script that died with the decree that made it, and a formula that outlived everybody and was still being cited in 1913

The order of the endings

The chronology is the finding, and it is worth setting out before anything else because it is the wrong way round.

1349–54. Tai Situ Changchub Gyaltsen, myriarch of Phagmodru, extends his power across Ü, defeats the Sakya and their allies, and by 1354 has effectively displaced Sakya rule in Central Tibet. He then governs in his own name, revives Tibetan imperial-period forms and titles, replaces the myriarchies with a system of district fortresses, and issues a legal code.

1368. The Yuan dynasty is driven out of China. The Mongol court withdraws to the steppe. The dynasty had lasted ninety-seven years from its proclamation in 1271.

The client lost his country fourteen years before the patron lost his.

That ordering has to be explained, because the natural assumption is that a regime propped up by an empire falls when the empire does. Here it fell first, and while the empire was still nominally in place — the Yuan court recognised Changchub Gyaltsen's position after the fact, which is what a court does when it has no capacity to alter an outcome.

Why the client went first

Three reasons, and each was visible decades earlier.

The Sakya position had no residue. As the module on the default established, the pre-eminence rested on imperial recognition and on nothing that Tibetans had themselves agreed to. There was no rule that only a Khön could rule; no expectation among armed men that a challenger would be resisted by all; no institution rooted in Tibetan practice. Recognition was the whole of it, and recognition is a thing a distant

court either enforces or does not.

The lineage had fragmented. Temür's remedy of the 1290s — a Mongol princess and five further wives — had produced heirs in quantity, and by the 1320s Sakya was organised around several palaces with competing abbots and a nominal chief. An institution divided among branches of one over-supplied family cannot concentrate force against a challenger who is not.

And the challenger was a myriarch, which is to say a man whose position came from the settlement itself and who had soldiers. Changchub Gyaltsen did not come from outside the arrangement. He came from inside it, holding one of the thirteen units the census of 1268 had created, using the local power the arrangement had given him against the client the arrangement had elevated.

The parties that destroy an order are the parties it left outside its own settlement while giving them a capacity — the finding from the Seljuk study — and here the capacity was given by the settlement itself.

What died and what did not

Sort the wreckage and the sorting is instructive.

The script died. The *'Phags-pa* alphabet was an imperial decree without users, and when the decree lost its force it stopped being written. Nothing of it survives in use.

The offices died. Imperial Preceptor, the Bureau of Buddhist and Tibetan Affairs, the *dpon chen*, the thirteen myriarchies — all Yuan institutions, all gone within a generation of the dynasty.

The Sakya survived as what they had been before. An eminent lineage with a great monastery in Tsang, a school of Tibetan Buddhism among several, holders of a transmission. That is precisely what they were in 1243 and it is not nothing; the Sakya school exists today and the Khön still head it. **What they lost was the thing that had been lent to them.**

And the formula survived everything.

The formula's afterlife

Mchod yon outlived the Yuan by six centuries and was reused, deliberately and explicitly, at least twice more.

In 1578 Altan Khan of the Tümed met Sönam Gyatso of the Gelug school at Kokonor and the two revived the arrangement in almost so many words — Altan Khan as patron and protector, the lama as source of religious authority, with each conferring titles on the other. It is at that meeting that the title *Dalai Lama* was conferred. The

precedent invoked was Kublai and Phagpa.

And the Qing emperors took it up again, patronising the Gelug establishment, with the Qianlong emperor represented as an emanation of Mañjuśrī — the same identification Phagpa had made of Kublai.

Then, in 1913, at the Simla Conference, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama's negotiators cited the priest-patron relationship as the description of Tibet's historic relations with the Chinese courts, and the argument continues.

A formula invented to describe a relationship between a Tibetan lama and a Mongol khan in the 1260s was still being deployed in a twentieth-century boundary negotiation, by the successors of one party, against the successors of the other.

Reading the collapse against the framework

The first finding, and it is this study's central one. The order of the endings — client at 1354, patron at 1368 — establishes something the other cases in this sequence could not.

An imported pre-eminence is more fragile than the empire that imports it, because it rests on the empire's *attention* rather than on the empire's *existence*. The Yuan in 1354 still existed, still held China, still had armies. What it no longer had was the capacity or the will to enforce an arrangement in a distant, unprofitable territory while its own position at home was deteriorating. The client did not need his patron to fall; he needed his patron to become distracted, which happens much sooner and much more easily.

State it as a rule for any case of indirect rule: **date a client regime's danger not from its patron's collapse but from the first moment its patron has a more urgent problem elsewhere.** That moment arrives decades earlier and is far less visible.

The second finding, on what survives an order. Sort what died here by type and the pattern is exact. The **decreed** things died — the script, the offices, the bureau, the myriarchies. The **inherited** things survived — the Khön lineage, the monastery, the school, the transmission. And the **descriptive** thing survived longest of all: the formula.

A legitimating formula is the most durable object any order produces, more durable than its institutions and far more durable than its instruments, because it requires no maintenance, costs nothing to hold, and can be picked up by any later party in an analogous position. Altan Khan reached for it three centuries later; the Qing reached for it four; a diplomatic delegation reached for it six and a half.

Which is the sequence's cumulative point arriving from a new direction. **What a ruler builds to legitimate himself outlives him in the form of a description**

available to strangers — and the strangers who pick it up will be, characteristically, whoever is currently in the weaker of the two positions it describes.

A note on sources.

Tai Situ Changchub Gyaltsen's rise from the Phagmodru myriarchy, his displacement of Sakya rule in Central Tibet by about 1354, his revival of imperial-period Tibetan forms, his replacement of the myriarchy system with district fortresses (*rdzong*) and his legal code are standard. The Yuan court's recognition of the outcome is as reported.

The expulsion of the Yuan from China in 1368 and the dynasty's ninety-seven years from its proclamation in 1271 are standard.

The fragmentation of Sakya among competing palaces following the multiplication of Zangpo Pal's heirs is treated in Module 8, where the causal inference is marked as this study's.

The disuse of the *'Phags-pa* script after the dynasty is treated in Module 4.

The meeting of Altan Khan and Sönam Gyatso at Kokonor in 1578, the mutual conferral of titles, and the origin of the title *Dalai Lama* there are standard, as is the explicit invocation of the Kublai-Phagpa precedent. The Qing patronage of the Gelug establishment and the representation of the Qianlong emperor as an emanation of Mañjuśrī are standard. The invocation of the priest-patron relationship at the Simla Conference of 1913 is treated in Module 3, where the contested character of the formula is set out and where this study declines to take a position on the sovereignty question.

The proposition that a client regime's danger dates from its patron's distraction rather than its patron's fall, and the classification of what survives an order by decreed, inherited and descriptive, are this study's.

MODULE 11

THE ROAD AND THE TRANSLATION

Module 11 · the grim accounting — a ledger in which the achievements are mostly texts and the costs are mostly labour, and a record in which one party's peasants appear only as a number

The first column

Set down what came out of the arrangement, at the fullest valuation either party would give.

A century of order in a country that had had none for four hundred years. Whatever else is true of Sakya rule, Central Tibet between roughly 1268 and 1350 had a single recognised authority, an enumerated population, defined administrative units, and a communications network. Men who had lived under whichever local lord held the valley now lived under a system. For a great many purposes that is an improvement and it should be entered as one.

An immense flow of texts and learning. The Mongol century is when Tibetan Buddhism becomes an Inner Asian religion rather than a Tibetan one. Tibetan lamas at the Yuan court, Tibetan supervision of Chinese monasteries, translation, canon-formation, and the beginning of the transmission that would eventually make this tradition the religion of Mongolia.

Phagpa's own writings, including the *Explanation of the Knowable* composed for Kublai's heir Jingim, which is among other things an attempt to state a Buddhist theory of government for a non-Tibetan prince.

A script, which failed, and which is nonetheless one of the more remarkable intellectual objects of the medieval world and the reason historical linguists can reconstruct thirteenth-century Chinese phonology.

And the formula, which supplied Inner Asia with a workable template for relations between armed power and religious authority for the next six hundred years, and which was reached for again in 1578 and again under the Qing because it worked.

The second column

Now the other side.

The 1240 campaign. Small by Mongol standards; two monasteries burned; five hundred dead on the reported figure. Small is not nothing, and the demonstration is what made the letter effective.

The relay stations. Households along the routes supplying mounts, fodder, provisions and lodging, indefinitely, at their own cost, for a communications system carrying instructions they had no part in and receiving nothing back. This is the heaviest continuous burden of the whole arrangement and it fell entirely on people who are not named anywhere.

The census and the assessment, collected through myriarchs whose positions depended on delivering it.

1281. An army of Mongols and Amdo Tibetans entering the country to execute the *dpon chen*, and a strengthened garrison afterwards.

1285. The Drikung rising and its suppression, with monasteries burned on the other side this time.

The Daoists. The one clear case of religious suppression in the reign, and its victims were not Tibetans at all but the establishments of a Chinese religion that lost a debate at a Mongol court in 1258.

And the fourteenth century, in which the arrangement's own creations — the myriarchies — fought each other and one of them destroyed the client, in fighting whose costs are not recorded.

Why the record leans, and in which direction

The source problem here is the most severe of the four studies in this sequence, and its direction is unusual.

In the Mughal case both surviving witnesses were on the emperor's payroll. In the Investiture case both parties wrote, at length, in a pamphlet war. Here **one party wrote administratively and the other wrote devotionally, and neither wrote about the governed.**

The Chinese record treats Tibet as bureaus, appointments, seals and titles, because that is what a chancery records. It contains no account of what the relay obligation did to a household in Kham.

The Tibetan record is religious historiography, written mostly a century or more later, organised around lineages, teachers, transmissions and the merit of patrons. It

contains a great deal about who received which initiation from whom and very little about the assessment.

So the arrangement is recorded from two directions, both of them from above, in two vocabularies neither of which has a place for a peasant. There is no Badauni here, no dissenting insider writing in secret; there is no equivalent of the *Libelli de lite*; there is no legal literature stating what a cultivator was owed. The censuses counted households and the counts do not survive in a form that tells us anything about the households.

That absence is the single largest thing this study cannot do, and it is recorded rather than filled.

They do not net

And the two columns are, as in every case in this sequence, one transaction seen from two ends.

The century of order was produced by the census, and the census was the instrument of the assessment. The flow of texts and learning ran along the relay roads that the households beside them maintained. The formula that gave Inner Asia its template for six hundred years was a description of an arrangement enforced, when it needed enforcing, by an army that executed a *dpon chen* and burned monasteries.

The achievements were carried on the infrastructure, and the infrastructure was the cost.

Reading the accounting against the framework

The finding, and it is a source-critical one this collection should carry. Three of the four studies in this sequence have found records biased by who could write. This one adds a sharper variant: **where the two parties to an arrangement record it in two different genres, the gap between the genres is where the governed disappear.**

An administrative record and a devotional record do not overlap. One is about offices and the other about lineages; neither is about the people the offices and lineages lived on. When both survive, a historian may feel well served — two independent traditions, two languages, mutual corroboration — and may not notice that the corroboration covers only the part both parties were interested in, which is each other.

The test is whether either genre would have recorded a famine. Here neither would, and neither did.

And the second finding, on how to price an achievement that is made of texts. This case's first column is unusually attractive because it is largely intellectual: translations, transmissions, a script, a political theory, a formula. Intellectual achievements are easy to admire and hard to price, because their production costs are invisible — a translation costs the labour of scholars who were fed by estates worked by people who left no record.

The intellectual output of an order is not evidence about the order's cost, and treating it as an offset is a category error that flatters every literate regime in history. The right entry is that the texts were made, that they were valuable, that they outlasted everything else, and that the arrangement which produced them was maintained by an obligation to supply horses to strangers indefinitely.

A note on sources.

The figures in this module are as reported and none is verified: the 1240 campaign's five hundred casualties and two monasteries, given as orders of magnitude in the Landscape and Module 1.

No figures are given anywhere in this study for the population of Tibet, for the yield of any myriarchy, for tribute, for the number of households on any relay route, for casualties in the 1285 rising or the fourteenth-century fighting, or for the extent of Daoist losses after 1258, because the surviving material supports none.

Phagpa's *Shes bya rab gsal*, the *Explanation of the Knowable*, composed for Kublai's heir Jingim, is standard; the study has not consulted a translation and reports only its existence and addressee.

The Tibetan narrative sources and their dating, and the character of the *Yuan shi*, are treated in Module 7. The Buddhist-Daoist proceedings of 1258 are treated in Module 4, the 1281 intervention and the 1285 rising in Module 1.

The proposition that the gap between an administrative genre and a devotional genre is where the governed disappear, and the argument that intellectual output cannot be entered as an offset against an order's costs, are this study's.

MODULE 12

THE FOURTH POSITION

Module 12 · convergence and divergence — four rulers, one problem, and a table that is now complete; with the strongest case for the arrangement, stated fully and answered

The table

Four studies in this sequence have examined four rulers facing one problem. Force compels and cannot make obedience owed. Somewhere there must be a party who can declare that obedience is owed, and the declaration is worth having only because the ruler could not have produced it.

The four answers separate on two variables, and this case completes them.

Where the credential lives. In an office, in a person, or in a family.

Where the funding lives. In a perpetual private endowment, in a terminable state grant, or in an exemption.

The Seljuks met a credential lodged in the person — the *ijāza*, master to student, compellable by nobody — funded by *waqf*, a perpetual private endowment. Nizām al-Mulk could neither license his scholars nor starve them, and spent a fortune on colleges to purchase a faction rather than an authority.

Latin Christendom met a credential lodged in an office — ordination by a bishop, in a hierarchy running to Rome — funded by lands held in perpetuity by the institution. It was capturable, both parties saw it, and they fought for fifty years because there was something to win.

Akbar met the same personal credential the Seljuks met, funded differently: *madad-i maʿāsh*, a state grant for a lifetime, renewable at an imperial officer's pleasure. He could not license and could starve, and got signatures that held exactly as long as the pressure did.

Kublai is the fourth position and it is the strangest. The credential he chose lived in a **family** — the Khön, holding Sakya hereditarily since 1073 — and it was funded by **exemption**, the weakest lever of the three.

And the reason it is the strangest is that **he chose it.** No other ruler in this sequence had a choice.

The choice

That is the case's central fact and everything else follows from it.

The Seljuks took the caliphate because it was the only source of Islamic title in existence. The German emperors took the papacy because there was no other church. Akbar took the *'ulamā'* because they were the only jurists in Hindustan.

Kublai had a menu. He had Chinese Confucians with an examination system, Daoists with an organised establishment, Muslims across Central Asia, Nestorian Christians in his own family, a Mongol shamanic tradition, and four or five Tibetan Buddhist schools. His general graded them for him and reported which was best in institution, which in worldly competence, which in splendour and which in learning.

And what he did with the menu is the finding. **He declined the capturable credential and bought the uncapturable one.**

The Chinese examination is the most perfectly capturable instrument any civilisation has built: the state sets the questions, prescribes the canon, appoints the examiners, and thereby owns every man whose standing derives from passing. The Qing would use it for two hundred and sixty-eight years. Kublai suspended it, and when it was eventually restored in 1315 it was held six times in the dynasty's ninety-seven years, with a third of the places reserved for Mongols, producing perhaps five hundred graduates.

He took instead a foreign clergy of a few lineages from a country of no fiscal significance, whose credential he could never hold and whose leadership reproduced biologically.

Because a credential a ruler can capture is a credential that can capture the ruler. The examination would have delivered a steerable bureaucracy and a constitution in the same package: a canon defining what an emperor is, a class entitled to remonstrate, a standard by which he could be found wanting, and a language in which his failure could be stated. Kublai was not a Chinese emperor and declined to become one. **He preferred an authority that could legitimate without prescribing** — and the *cakravartin* is exactly that, a compliment with no policy content.

What that cost him

The bill came due and it is the honest counterweight to the cleverness.

A credential lodged in a family is hostage to biology, and when Dharmapala's branch died out in 1287 the arrangement's supply failed and the court had to appoint outsiders for nearly twenty years, and then to manage a Tibetan family's marriages — a princess and five further wives — to restart it.

A clergy funded by exemption cannot be starved, and the exempt sector grew across a century in an empire with chronic fiscal difficulty.

A foreign clergy that prescribes nothing also **binds nothing**. The Confucian literati would have told Kublai what a good emperor does and would have supplied a class committed to his state surviving. Phagpa told him he was a wheel-turning monarch and supplied a lineage in Tsang. When the dynasty's difficulties came, there was no class of men whose entire standing depended on the Yuan continuing.

The Yuan lasted ninety-seven years. The Qing, which funded the certificate and held the leash, lasted two hundred and sixty-eight. That is not a proof and the causes of both durations are many. It is the comparison the case invites and it should be entered.

The strongest case for the arrangement

Stated as its best advocate would state it, and the advocate here is Tibetan rather than Mongol.

You have written a study about a client and a patron. Consider what the arrangement actually was.

Tibet had had no government for four hundred years. In 1240 a Mongol army entered it and could have done to it what Mongol armies did to Nishapur, Baghdad and Kiev. Instead a single elderly monk travelled to Liangzhou, negotiated, and wrote home; and the country entered the largest empire in history without a war.

What followed was not occupation. It was a relationship in which the lama gave what a lama gives — teaching, initiation, the rites, the recognition of a ruler as a protector of the Dharma — and the khan gave what a khan gives, which is protection and the means to govern. The lama did not become a Mongol subject; he became a teacher whose disciple happened to rule the world. That is what mchod yon *means and it is not a euphemism.*

And it worked. Tibet was not depopulated, not colonised, not converted, not taxed to ruin. Its religion was honoured and exported. Its scholars sat at the greatest court on earth. Its script-maker designed an alphabet for an empire. And when the Mongols went, Tibet was still Tibetan, still Buddhist, and had its monasteries and its lineages intact — which is more than can be said for anywhere else the Mongol armies reached.

Measure it against Baghdad in 1258, not against an ideal.

The answer

Much of that is true and the comparison with Baghdad is the strongest part of it.

Tibet was not destroyed and the arrangement is the reason. Concede it without qualification. Sakya Pandita's letter is one of the most consequential documents in Asian history and what it prevented is not speculative — the Mongols did the alternative, repeatedly, in places that refused.

But the relationship was not symmetrical and the sources that say it was are mostly later and mostly from one side. The client was executed by imperial troops in 1281 in the person of his own chief administrator; the emperor appointed Sakya's abbot from outside the family when the family failed; a khan ordered a Tibetan hierarch's marriages. Those are not the acts of a disciple toward a teacher.

And the pre-eminence was lent, not given. The Khön were an eminent lineage before 1244 and an eminent lineage after 1354, and in between they held something that belonged to a court in Khanbaliq. When the court became distracted — not fell, merely became distracted — a myriarch with soldiers took it, fourteen years before the dynasty ended.

The country got a government and could not keep it. For a century the answer to who leads Tibet was whoever the emperor recognises, and a century of that answer is a century in which no other answer developed. What Changchub Gyaltsen built in the 1350s he built from nothing, reaching back past the Mongol century to imperial forms four hundred years older, because the Mongol century had left him nothing usable.

Now the concession, and it should be the last thing this sequence says.

The arrangement's central instrument was mutual authorisation — each party holding a title the other conferred — and this study has called that a circle and noted that everyone could see it. It survived anyway, for a century, and was reached for again in 1578 and again by the Qing and again at a conference table in 1913.

Which means the circle was not the weakness it appears to be, and the reason is the one thing this sequence has established from four directions. **An authorisation is worth having because the beneficiary could not have produced it — and in a mutual arrangement, neither party could have produced his own.** Kublai could not have made himself a *cakravartin*; only a man from inside the tradition could say it. Phagpa could not have made himself pre-eminent in Tibet; only a man with an army could arrange it. Each supplied precisely what the other's world could not generate, and neither could have manufactured his own half.

That is not a circle. It is two halves of a transaction, each of which satisfies the condition separately. The Seljuks satisfied it by leaving an office alone for two centuries. Henry IV satisfied it by standing barefoot in the snow. Akbar failed to satisfy it and got a paper that lasted nine months. Kublai and Phagpa satisfied it twice at once, in opposite directions, which is why the formula outlived them by six hundred years

and is still in the mouths of people arguing about a border.

And what it could not do was survive the erosion of either party's independent base, because the moment one of them stands on nothing but the other's word, the transaction becomes an assertion. The Sakya's base eroded first. That is the whole of the collapse, and it happened while the patron was still standing.

A note on sources.

The comparisons in this module rest on the three preceding studies in this sequence — *The Seljuks and the Abbasid Caliphate*, *The Investiture Contest*, and *The Ibadat Khana and the Mahzar* — and on the Qing study in this collection; where facts about those cases are stated without citation they are documented there.

The suspension and partial restoration of the Chinese examinations under the Yuan, with their frequency, quotas and output, are treated in Module 4 with their sources. The durations given — ninety-seven years for the Yuan from 1271 to 1368, two hundred and sixty-eight for the Qing from 1644 to 1912 — are arithmetic on standard dates and no causal claim is made from them beyond the invitation to compare.

The extinction of Dharmapala Rakshita's branch of the Khön family, the appointment of outsiders, and Temür's provision of a Mongol princess and order of five further marriages are treated in Module 8. The 1281 execution of Kunga Zangpo is treated in Module 1. Changchub Gyaltsen's displacement of Sakya by 1354 and his reach back to imperial-period forms are treated in Module 10.

The counter-position in this module is composed, not quoted. It is an attempt to state the case for the arrangement as its best Tibetan advocate would state it, drawing on claims that appear across the historiography and in the modern political literature rather than on any single author, and it is answered point by point rather than dismissed. **This study takes no position on the question of Tibet's historic political status, which is contested and is not what a study of this kind is for.**

A structural parallel between a caliphal investiture, a papal absolution, a *maḥẓar* and a *mchod yon* relationship should not be pressed into an identity: they are four different instruments in four traditions, they decay differently, and they are vulnerable to different attacks — which is what the two-variable analysis above is for.

◆

Part of the collection Patterns of Power. Tested, never revealed.